

Dual Religiosity in Northern Malawi

*Ngonde Christians and
African Traditional Religion*



Joyce Mlenga



MZUNI PRESS

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear husband, Moses Mlenga, who recognized the potential in me such that he encouraged and supported me to study up to postgraduate level.

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I thank God for using various people to make this study possible. I wish to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Klaus Fiedler, who tirelessly offered guidance, support and constructive criticism throughout the period of this study. I cannot imagine bringing this work to successful completion without his wholehearted availability and encouragement. My thanks should also go to Dr. Peter Qeko Jere for reading my work and for his valuable insights. I thank all the members of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies for the role they played in my studies.

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List of Abbreviations

AMEC	African Methodist Episcopal Church
ANC	African National Church
ATR	African Traditional Religion
CCAP	Church of Central African Presbyterian
CLAIM	Christian Literature Association in Malawi
DHO	District Health Officer
ELCM	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi
ELCT	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania
ESV	English Standard Version
MZUNI	Mzuzu University
NIV	New International Version
PHA	Pentecostal Holiness Association
SBM	Southern Baptist Mission
SCOM	Student Christian Organization of Malawi
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
UMCA	Universities Mission to Central Africa
UNIMA	University of Malawi
ZCC	Zion Christianity Church

The Bible version used is the NIV, unless indicated otherwise.

Introduction

The Ngonde people are found in Karonga, one of the border districts in northern Malawi. Their boundaries start just south of Karonga Town and extend north along Lake Malawi to the northern border of Malawi and Tanzania. Karonga covers 3,355 km² and has a population of 270,960 according to the 2008 census carried out by the National Statistical Office.¹ The Ngonde are closely related to the Nyakyusa of Tanzania, they are only separated by political boundaries. Some of the Nyakyusa live in Karonga. In fact, according to the 2008 census, there were 18,751 Nyakyusa living in Malawi.

Historically, the Ngonde are believed to have settled in the Songwe area around the 15th Century with Kyungu as their chief. The first Kyungu, Syora and his five nobles arrived and settled at Mbande Hill, situated in the gap (Mpata) in the mountains just west of Karonga. These came with trade in mind and they started trading in ivory which was being sent across the lake, eastwards. The control of trade in his region made the Kyungu a powerful ruler. Apart from being paramount chief of the Ngonde, Kyungu was also the spiritual paramount for his people, responsible for their health and unity. If the Kyungu was wounded or sick, Ngonde as a whole suffered. Droughts, though not common in the Ngonde area, were believed to result from the action of a Kyungu, living or dead. When droughts occurred, his nobles and sub chiefs visited him at his capital at Mbande, bringing gifts and asking for help. Rains were very important to the Ngonde, because, apart from the ivory trade which was controlled by the chief and the nobles, the ordinary Ngonde lived as simple pastoral and agricultural communities.

The 19th Century saw the coming of Christianity to Africa by the European missionaries and Africans responded differently to it. The Livingstonia Mission influenced the northern region greatly so that it became the main centre of its work.² In Karonga, the religious position of the Kyungu was a barrier to missionary penetration. This explains why the Ngonde were initially resistant to the gospel. With passage of time, mission work was fully established among the Ngonde and Christianity gained ground. Today, there are many Christian churches among the Ngonde, but still, Ngonde traditional religious beliefs are practiced along with Christianity.

¹ Republic of Malawi: Karonga District Socio-Economic Profile: 2009-2011, p. 22.

² John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi. The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008.

I carried out this study as an insider, someone who has an idea of what goes on in the lives of the Ngonde. I also carried it out as a Christian, a member of and an elder in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), with evangelical inclinations.³ Being a Christian helps me appreciate the tension that Ngonde Christians experience in living the two realities of Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

This inquiry is a combination of ethnographic and phenomenological study. It is ethnographic in that an in-depth analytical description and interpretation of naturally occurring behaviour within the Ngonde social group has been given. The study is phenomenological in that it describes and interprets "the experiences of participants in order to understand the 'essence' of the experience *as perceived by the participants*."⁴ Some names and some personal information have been concealed for ethical reasons.

I want to thank all who contributed to my study. I understand and appreciate the right of my informants to "receive back" the results of my study to which they contributed. Since it is not possible for me to provide the results to individuals, I have turned the study into this book, published in Malawi, so that they, and the wider community of Ngonde Christians, may have access to the results and maybe profit from the work I did.

It must also be noted that I am aware that humankind is female and male; however, in this study, I intend to take care of this fact by often using only one of the genders, different from traditional English grammar.⁵ I do this to avoid the often cumbersome use of she/he and her/his, etc. For God I always use the male gender (as the Bible mostly does), though I am fully aware that God is neither female nor male. In Kyangonde these difficulties are evaded since the prefix for both female and male is the same.

Dual Religiosity

The key concept I use in this book is Dual Religiosity, so I briefly discuss it in this Introduction. Dual religiosity is a descriptive term that will be used to refer to a situation where individuals practise two separate religions, or

³ My Evangelical background has its origins in my involvement with a national organization known as Student Christian Organization of Malawi (SCOM) whose main aim is to call all students to a personal faith in Christ.

⁴ James H. McMillan, *Educational Research: Fundamentals for the Consumer*, 3rd ed, New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 2000, p. 269.

⁵ Traditional grammar makes the male form stand for both genders, which may cause the female side to be overlooked at times.

elements of each, concurrently.⁶ Dual religiosity belongs to the large family of syncretism,⁷ which refers to the "attempted union or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices, especially in philosophy or religion."⁸ Such syncretism may or may not involve the creation of a new form of religion. It may remain at the process of blending for a long time, but there is also a possibility that a total fusion might take place and a new form of religion may emerge. The result may not always be a total fusion, but may be a combination of separate portions that remain identifiable compartments.⁹

Dual religiosity shows no attempts to combine two religions and to develop a synthesis or create a new religion. In dual religiosity one practices both either to supplement or to complement the other, or as a way of life. This fits one of Rudolph's various types of syncretism called "Symbiosis."¹⁰ Dual religiosity, as a form of syncretism, involves practicing two separate religions, concurrently, depending on the demands on the life of an individual. People, who are Christians, in certain situations, make use of ATR elements without any intention of being less Christian, they just regard

⁶ The phrase "dual religiosity" has been chosen because it best describes the religiosity of the Ngonde. Additionally, I am avoiding the use of the term "syncretism" which often carries "a pejorative connotation." See Robert D. Baird, "Syncretism and the History of Religions," in Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 48-57 [56].

⁷ I am aware that what I describe as dual religiosity may well be called syncretism by some scholars. One such scholar is Robert D. Baird, "Syncretism and the History of Religions," in Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 48-57. He argues that there is no way two conflicting elements, ideas or practices can be united into a harmonious whole without modification. He states that "syncretism merely retains the conflicting elements without having successfully reconciled them," p. 53. This shows that the contradictory elements are maintained side by side.

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition, 1989.

⁹ S.R. Imbach, "Syncretism" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, pp. 1062-1063.

¹⁰ Symbiosis is a type of syncretism which is demonstrated in "the 'living together' of two externally separate forms of religious expression which believers consider to be a relative unity." The "religions exist side by side and are selectively taken by most adherents, depending upon the exigency," p. 81. See Kurt Rudolph, "Syncretism: From Theological Invective to a Concept in the Study of Religion," in Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2004, 68-85.

them as separate—they belong to two different levels.¹¹ There is no intention of reconciling the two; each has its own sphere and/or time of operation. In this case, one ends up with dualism.

It is important to note that those who practise dual religiosity may not be aware that they are involved in dual religiosity and may even deny it. Dual religiosity comes in when there is a kind of divided loyalty in an individual (two faiths in one mind).¹² "A person with a dualistic worldview simply assumes that life has two distinct realms—no matter what he does; he does it within and from out of this 'two realm' view."¹³ The issue of duality remains a reality to an African.

Dual religiosity can be practised differently by different Christians. Some Christians practise it consciously or unconsciously or casually, premeditated, while others participate in it persistently. Many people, however, slip into dual religiosity unconsciously. They worship God as Christians and do not intend to worship other deities or spirits. However, they find themselves confronted in everyday life with many problems and fears for which the "traditions of home" offer certain solutions through divination, sacrifices and charms, while most of the Christian leaders usually do not address these problems.¹⁴

Even though dual religiosity can involve any two kinds of religions, for example, Islam and African Traditional Religion,¹⁵ I am very much interested in dual religiosity that involves African Traditional Religion and Christianity since my study focuses on the relationship between the two.

¹¹ Bregje de Kok, *Christianity and African Religion: Two Realities of a Different Kind: A Cultural Psychological Study of the Way Christian Malawians Account for their Involvement in African Traditional Religion*. Zomba: Kachere, 2004.

¹² Cyril Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria*, Aldershot: Avebury, 1987, p. 262.

¹³ Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984, p. 96.

¹⁴ This does not apply to the charismatic churches which tend to see evil as the result of demonic activity in the spiritual realm and make provisions to solve the problems through prayer, exorcism and deliverance sessions. For Sierra Leone see Bosco Bangura, *The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone: A Missio-historical Analysis in View of African Culture, Prosperity Gospel and Power Theology*, PhD, Evangelical Theological Faculty Leuven, 2013.

¹⁵ I am quite aware that dualism does not exist among Africans only; it is a worldwide issue.

Chapter 1: Ngonde Traditional Religious Beliefs

The Ngonde are known to be religious, with very strong belief in spirits; and that is the reason why one of the authors, Duncan R. Mackenzie described them as the 'Spirit Ridden Konde.' Mackenzie observes thus:

The Konde are 'either a deeply religious, or a deplorably spirit-ridden people'. If religion means a sense of dependence upon unseen powers, then it cannot be denied that the Konde are religious. On all great occasions, prayer and offerings are made; but also when a spirit is believed to be angry; if there is quarrelling in the family; if a man beats his wife; if a girl has arrived at puberty, or a marriage has been arranged without their being consulted; if a woman has been unfaithful to her husband; if a man neglects parents; if ceremonies are neglected; or the spirits themselves forgotten. Their wrath is shown very specially by a disease of the lips breaking out on the guilty person, and by fever; but also in many other ways; by the failure of the beer to ferment, by sickness, by a storm with which someone is drowned, by failure of crops, of increase of livestock, of children, by too little or too much rain, or by ill-success in hunting or fishing; and, very emphatically, by a sudden death.¹

Since my study focuses on the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion pertaining to the Ngonde, it is important to understand the traditional religious beliefs of the Ngonde. This section will focus on the major elements of African Traditional Religion which include: belief in concept of God and ancestors, divine kingship, spirits, healing, witchcraft and other elements. It is noteworthy that some of these beliefs have vanished and are no longer being adhered to.

The Concept of God

The Ngonde do believe in the supreme God. Duncan Mackenzie records that the Ngonde believed in the Supreme Being long before the coming of the Europeans in general and the missionaries in particular. This, Mackenzie observes, was demonstrated by the numerous references that the Ngonde made to God in their language. In addition, prayers and sacrifices were made to God.² All people had to bow down in worship to him. Monica Wilson made the same observation in the 1950s that "in the Ngonde

¹ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 200.

² Ibid. p. 178.

conversations, the name *Kyala* featured highly in various contexts."³ Even today, both Christians and non-Christians, still believe in one God, most powerful, and most high. Even those who do not go to any church or belong to any Christian denomination still talk about God, especially when they are in trouble or when disaster strikes. The name commonly used in Kyangonde was *Kyala*, which is still used today. Dolb Mwakanandi believes that *Kyala* comes from the root verb *ala*, which means "to spread." Thus the noun *Kyala* would mean "the power which has spread through the universe."⁴ A.E. Mackenzie, wife to Duncan Mackenzie, tried to compose a Kyangonde Dictionary, which she was unable to complete, but the definition of *Kyala* that she documented has the same idea of 'spreading': "*Kyala alile Kumwanya na pasi* – God has spread the sky and the earth."⁵ Some Ngonde believe that *Kyala* comes from the word *kwala* which means to "spread" (*ali posa*), the omnipresent who laid down the pattern of nature.⁶

Monica Wilson noted that for the Ngonde, *Kyala* was one hero among others, but his name is also used in the sense of 'the Lord': a chief is *Kyala gwake* (his lord) to his subjects, a father is *kyala gwake* to his son or daughter 'because he created him' and a shade⁷ is *Kyala* to his living kinsman (*unsyuka jo kyala*). However, it is noteworthy that *Kyala* was used by the European missionaries as their translation of 'God'. "In the past these three conceptions were inextricably mixed: *Kyala* the hero, *Kyala* 'the lord', and *Kyala* the Christian deity."⁸ Today, the word *Kyala* is normally used for *Kyala*, the Christian deity. Other names are:

Ndolombwike: The name used at formal occasions, coming from the verb *kulolomboka*, meaning to create in a sense in which God only can. It

³ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 157-159.

⁴ Dolb Simion Mwakanandi, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*, PhD, University of Stellenbosch, 1990, p. 28.

⁵ A.E. Mackenzie, *Kyangonde Dictionary*. Unpublished Manuscripts 1920-1925. Malawi National Archives 47, LIM/4/13, Zomba.

⁶ Int. A.K. Mwakasungula, Village Headman, Mwakasungula Village, 22.11.2011.

⁷ Monica Wilson speaks of the ancestors as the "shades." Cf. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969.

⁸ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 17-18.

means God is Creator. However, some Ngonde have a different meaning of *kulolomboka* which is normally used in reference to a ghost.⁹

Mpeli: this also applies to God only. It means the Maker.

Tenende: Describes God as the Owner of all things.

Nkulumuke Mfwasyale: God is the Undying One, the Eternal.

Mbamba: God is almighty, the Powerful One like lightning.

Kayubili: this name indicates that God is the Unseen One, yet one who knows everything.

Mwalankusa: The God who is eternal.

Kalesi: Describes the attribute of Omnipresence, he who is present everywhere.

Kamanyimanyi: The name implies that God is a being who knows everything, seen and unseen.

Chata: The Originator

Untwa: Ruler

Mwikemo: He is holy

Kalyoto: The Great One

Tata wa Twesa: The Father of us all from whom help may be expected when men deserve it.¹⁰

The names that are given to God also describe the attributes of God.¹¹ God is therefore conceived by the Ngonde as the creator or maker of all things. In addition, he owns and knows everything, both visible and invisible. He is holy, omnipresent, great, eternal, the powerful one, and the provider or helper of all people. This is the God they worshipped and some still worship him today through various prayers and sacrifices when need arises. When one listens to a Ngonde prayer it may appear as if it is directly addressed to the ancestral spirits, and therefore misunderstood to be ancestral

⁹ Int. A.K. Mwakasungula, Village Headman, Mwakasungula Village, 22.11.2011.

¹⁰ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 182.

¹¹ This is similar to the Chewa's conception of God. See J.C. Chakanza, "Some Chewa Concepts of God," *Religion in Malawi*, Vol. 1, 1987.

worship,¹² but in actual sense the prayer is addressed to God through the ancestors, who are expected to carry the petitions to God, who is the provider of all things. Ancestors are believed to be closer to God than those who are living. These act as intermediaries between them and God. The Ngonde believe that God is supreme over human beings and spirits and over the forces of nature, and that is why they go to him when things get out of order. However, the spirits (including ancestral spirits) are believed to be above human beings, and as such they are of great importance in Ngonde religious life. This is in line with what John Mbiti expresses concerning the living dead:

Because they are still "people," the living-dead are therefore the best group of intermediaries between men and God: they know the needs of men, they have "recently" been here with men, and at the same time they have full access to the channels of communicating with God directly or, according to some societies, indirectly through their own forefathers. Therefore men approach them more often for minor needs of life than they approach God. Even if the living-dead may not do miracles or extraordinary things to remedy the need, people experience a sense of psychological relief when they pour out their hearts' troubles before their seniors who have a foot in both worlds.¹³

Ancestors

In Africa, there is lively belief in the continued existence of the dead and in the influence of elders both living and dead over their offspring. Duncan Ross Mackenzie expresses it thus:

The fact of death is not regarded by the tribes of central Africa as forming a barrier between the living and the dead. The two form one community and the means of communication between them are naturally therefore well developed. Living and dead are mutually dependent, and a certain amount of goodwill must necessarily exist between them. What the dead cannot do for themselves, the living must do for them. And what the living must know, but do not, the dead can tell them if properly interrogated. It is upon this fact that divination depends, as do omens to some extent.¹⁴

¹² Authors like D.R. Mackenzie believe that the Ngonde worshipped the spirits since sacrifices and offerings, which are an act of worship, were made to the spirits. See Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 190.

¹³ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, p. 108.

¹⁴ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 225.

The Ngonde believed that when a person died his *msyuka* (spirit), migrated to the land of the spirits but could return from time to time to affect the lives of the living.¹⁵ *Abasyuka* (plural for *msyuka*) formed an integral part of the Ngonde community, because of their continued interest in the affairs of their descendants. In fact, they acted as mediators between the physical and the spiritual world. These spirits could return to their human families to share meals with them. For example, when one was eating and food fell down on the floor, it was a taboo to pick it up and eat it because it was believed that the spirits had eaten it. The living had to ensure that the ancestral spirits were happy all the time, failure to do so could lead to disaster. *Abasyuka* had powers to bring calamities on the living if, and whenever they were not pleased with them. Whenever this occurred, it became imperative to offer sacrifices in order to appease them. Each of the families constructed its own shrine where sacrifices were made by the leader of the family in the event of calamities that occurred at family level. For instance, "the Mwenifumbos had their own shrine where the family gathered to pray to the spirits of their ancestors."¹⁶

At community level, the chief ancestors were those of the Kyungus. "The ruling Kyungu and the spirits of his dead predecessors were believed to form one divine company, the anger of any one of whom had terrible effects, and both living and dead were placated with offerings."¹⁷ Chief Kyungu was the person officially connected with the spirits. He was the one who spoke with God, and he was also the man who spoke with authority to the spirits. Ancestors did determine what kind of life people would live depending on how they treated them. Even today, there is strong belief in *abasyuka*. When something goes wrong in the community or at family level, people feel forced to look around to find the cause, and in many cases the ancestral spirits are the culprits.

Several explanations as to why the ancestral spirits return to earth have been advanced. Some believe that the spirits return to the land of the living to encourage themselves that they still have off-spring, because if the family dies out, they will be forgotten because no one would remember them anymore. The spirits feel very important and honoured when the

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 192.

¹⁶ Owen Kalinga, *A History of the Ngonde Kingdom of Malawi*, Berlin: Mouton, 1985, p. 40.

¹⁷ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 42.

living pay attention to them.¹⁸ "The living dead do return in many ways through illness or other misfortune which overtakes the living; a stern reminder of duty to the dead, who will not permit neglect."¹⁹ Ancestral spirits may return to punish, to warn, or present a complaint that is affecting the living.

In Ngonde Traditional Religion, God is accessed through the ancestors. This is so because "the umbilical cord has not been broken between them and us."²⁰ The relationship between the living and the dead is very much alive. To show this, the Ngonde go to ancestral places of worship or to graves of ancestors when disaster strikes. This is still happening today. When disaster strikes at family level, people go to the graves of ancestors, but at community level, people go to Filagule, Mbande or Mwenekisindile. These are ancestral places of worship.²¹ At family level, one may be required to consult the ancestors when *bana bonyomoka pakilo* (when children are disturbed in their sleep at night). A certain village headman²² shared an experience in which his children could not sleep because their departed grandmother used to visit them at night, beckoning them to go where she was. He took his children to the grave of their grandmother and said the following words, "You, Nambera, don't come to your children, sleep in peace where you are." The children washed their faces with water that had been mixed with some herbs at the grave. From that time onwards, the grandmother did not appear to the children again.²³ This shows that there is direct communication between the living and the dead because the dead have the ability to hear and listen. The fact that the departed grandmother did not come back again shows that she got the message.

Ancestors form an integral part of the Ngonde cosmology. They can bless, curse or punish somebody depending on the situation. It is very common

¹⁸ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 195.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Int. A.K. Mwakasungula, Mwakasungula Village, 22.11.2011.

²¹ These places are normally situated on hills, and it is believed that there is a snake in each of these hills who is a representative of God. The places are characterized by forests. For more discussion on these, see chapter 2.

²² Int. Village Headman (name withheld), 12.3.2012.

²³ When the Ngonde speak of dead people appearing to them, it is through dreams. The Ngonde value dreams as a medium in which their living dead communicate to them. For more on dreams see Joel A.C. Nkhonya's paper on "Role of Dreams 'Injosi' among the Ngonde People of Karonga," Department of TRS, Chancellor College, no date.

among the Ngonde for elders to bless individuals while mentioning the names of ancestors departed long time ago. For example, when one is traveling, or going to begin secondary school or college education, or to seek employment, elders will say: *Misyuka ya ba mbuya bako yighone bughalama, kyala akusaye wende kanunu. Bapapi baghone bughalama!*²⁴ Ancestors are believed to bring luck to an individual.

Again, when one's life is believed to have been "darkened" (*wamupelile ngisi*), he is taken to the grave of one of the ancestors so that the elders can talk to the spirits. One's life is said to have been darkened when it is surrounded by misfortunes: cannot be employed, business not running properly, cannot marry, things just do not work! At this point, one is taken to the grave of father, mother or grandparent to settle issues. One shared a story of his friend who was in South Africa. He was not in good terms with his father. They had disagreed on some issues and the father was angry with him. The son rebelled instead of apologizing to his father. In 2003, while he was in South Africa, his father died, but he died a sad man, because he was always complaining about this rebellious son. The son heard about the death of his father but he was unable to attend his father's funeral due to other reasons. After the father's death, he became very sick to the point of death. When his relatives in Malawi heard about his illness, they sent two people to South Africa to pick him to seek further treatment in Malawi. In Malawi, he was taken to various traditional healers and one of them advised that the spirit of his father was angry with him, hence the illness. He further advised the son not to go close to his father's grave (unless he was going there to perform a ritual to ask for forgiveness), because he was angry with him to the point that he may die. The traditional healer therefore advised the son's guardians to ask the elders of the village to take him to the father's grave to ask for his father's forgiveness. At the grave, the elders spoke, as a kind of apology in Kyangonde:

We tata twafika nu mwana wako uyu	Father, we have brought your son
Umuhobokele	Forgive him
Pali nthamyo syo syalipo syo monangilane	You wronged each other on certain things
Umuhobokele umupepo mwabi	Forgive him, give him luck
Abombe fyosa ifyo angabomba	He should be able to do whatever he wants to do.
Umusatule!	Loose him! ²⁵

²⁴ The ancestral spirits should give you favour and bless you, have a safe trip, your parents should grant you favour.

²⁵ Int. William Mwenitete, Mwenitete II Village, 28.3.2011.

After this ritual he immediately got well. He is now in South Africa continuing with his work. It is believed that the dead do hear and act accordingly. In this case the dead father forgave his living son and granted him luck and healing.

It is also important to note that at community level, the ancestors, especially Kyungus who were believed to be divine, could display their anger through terrible effects. Their anger could result in droughts, sicknesses, sudden deaths, etc. That is why, when drought hit the village, the immediate reaction was to allege that one of the Kyungus was angry, either the living or a dead one. Following this, a ritual could be organized to appease that particular Kyungu. In cases of drought, nobles of the village could go to a diviner to enquire as to which Kyungu was angry and they would go ahead to offer a sacrifice as an appeasement. The names of all the Kyungus would be mentioned as people were asking for forgiveness and blessing.²⁶

Traditional Healers and Communication with the Dead

Ancestors are believed to play an important role in the lives of traditional healers. Some traditional healers appear to have started their occupation through communication with the dead, whom they normally call *misyuka*. An interview with several traditional healers shows that the dead communicated to them about their calling, what their problems were (for those who were suffering or spirit-possessed) and showed them the types of medicines they needed to give to their patients. It is no wonder therefore that even when it comes to singing songs, they sing songs of *misyuka* and Christian songs in their practice. For example, Mickwell Mogha, who calls himself an African doctor, shared with me that his mother, who died in 1981, visited him in a dream in 2002 to tell him to administer a certain medication to a woman who was sick. He obeyed and the woman was healed. As a sign of gratitude, the healed woman brought maize flour, soap and a mosquito net to him. He gladly received the items; however, his mother spoke to him in a dream to reprimand him to stop receiving money or anything that may be considered as payment for his assistance. On many occasions, treatment of various illnesses comes to him in a dream when he is asleep.²⁷ It is important to note that Mogha became a healer by being

²⁶ Int. Ephron Mwambungu, Mwanyesha Village, 5.3.2011. Some of the names included Mwakabanga, Mwakasungula, Kanyighe, Magemo, Mwangonde, Mwene-ngubwe, etc.

²⁷ Int. Mickwell Mogha, Mwakasoko Village, 4.3.2011.

possessed by a healing spirit.²⁸ At the time of the possession he became very sick and he claims that he 'died' for seven hours and people thought that he was dead. In fact, he said that the dead are the ones who tell him what to do because his illness emanated from the spirits.

Mogha's experience is similar to that of Fatuma Sichinga. *Misyuka* communicate to her even before the patient comes to see her. When a patient arrives she is fully aware of the problems that she will be bringing and has a solution readily available.²⁹ This shows that some of the traditional healers depend largely on their communication with the dead for them to function properly. Their ministry is spiritual and as such the spirits have to be involved.

Warfare and Prayers to the Ancestors

In the past the ancestors were consulted in times of war, especially those who were chiefs before they died. This became necessary because they needed the support of their ancestors if they were to succeed. The Kyungu and the nobles of Ngonde led the people in prayer. The leader of the nobles (*amakambala*) would begin, asking each of the ancestors in turn to bless them in the fight. After that, the great chiefs would pray after them, each addressing his own predecessors with his title.³⁰ In every war, there were religious elements. Chiefs had war medicines and prayed to their ancestors for success. Some of the nobles of Ngonde went with the warriors, carrying the magic war-tails of the Kyungu, his spear (*kamisa*) and a magic horn. The Ngonde still go to ancestors when they are faced with drought. Even in the wake of the earthquake in 2009 some elders appealed to the ancestors for mercy.

Divine Kingship

The issue of divine kingship among the Ngonde has a long mythological history. The Nyakyusa and the Ngonde believe that human beings originated from a 'dark house' located high on the Livingstone plateau from

²⁸ For a detailed discussion about spirit possession see Silas Ncozana, *The Spirit Dimension in African Christianity: A Pastoral Study among the Tumbuka People of Northern Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2002; for the traditional background among the Tumbuka see Boston Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015.

²⁹ Int. Fatuma Nambaro Sichinga, Mwakasoko Village, 4.3.2011.

³⁰ Godfrey Wilson: *The Constitution of Ngonde* (The Rhodes-Livingstone Papers no. 3), Manchester University Press, 1939, pp. 60-62.

which they jumped out.³¹ Another myth has it that the first heroes came from the north and were creators. The heroes were capable of creating and they created crops, animals and fire and distributed them to other people. The heroes had a creative force in their own beings, which was inherited by their descendants, the divine kings, and, in a lesser degree, the chiefs. The divine kings had an inborn creative power while the ordinary chiefs had pythons in their bellies (*mbungulu*) with which they could destroy their enemies. It was believed that there was no single supreme power; it lay in the several heroes, in medicines, in witches, and with the spirits. Kyala was a hero, a forefather, to whom sacrifices were made, and he was comparable to Lwembe and Kyungu, though he left no direct descendants. Today, Kyala is regarded as Lord.³² This suggests that at one point the Ngonde did not believe in the Supreme Being³³ but only in the power of the ancestors and their leader, the Kyungu.

The various authors who have written on the Ngonde attest to the fact that in the past, Kyunguship was divine.³⁴ The Kyungu was both a political and religious leader. The divine Kyungu was the centre and source of mystical power. Even the place where he used to reside, Mbande Hill, was a sacred place, since it was the home of the Kyungu, the divine king. Both the dead and the living Kyungus were believed to have religious powers in them.

In the past, the subjects of the Kyungu held him in high esteem in a way that revered him. This is evidenced by the fact that at times his nobles would surround the Kyungu, praising him while beating drums. This normally took place at Mbande Hill, the headquarters of the Kyungu. Ordinary people would also praise him while beating drums from a distance. The songs of praise that they used to sing were similar to the prayers they used to offer at the sacred groves of the departed chiefs. This makes authors conclude that the nobles of Ngonde worshipped the living

³¹ Steven Kayuni, *A Historical Study of Karonga and the Nkhonde People: Political, Economic, Cultural and Social Aspects*, np.: CMK Publications, 2001, p. 5.

³² Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 155-156.

³³ Even though this is believed to be a myth, some authors believe that the pre-colonial Ngonde were non-theistic, people just believed in the power of the heroes, Kyala being one of them.

³⁴ See Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959; Godfrey Wilson: *The Constitution of Ngonde*, London: Manchester University Press, 1939; Owen Kalinga, *A History of the Ngonde Kingdom of Malawi*, Berlin: Mouton, 1985.

Kyungu.³⁵ Since the Kyungu was believed to be divine, it is no wonder that he was worshipped, because being divine entailed that he had the attributes of God in him.

Mbande Hill was a sacred place and no ordinary people were allowed to walk into it, except for the nobles and the elder chiefs. The king had to be confined to his residence to avoid defilement since the Ngonde believed in the purity of their ruler. Even when it became necessary for the Kyungu to travel through his kingdom, all men except the ones mentioned above, would flee because they were afraid to look at him. The oldest stayed to look at him as he came; and they would fall down as a sign of respect, and clap their hands in "grateful worship."³⁶ This was their only greeting for the Kyungu; no one could greet him in the usual way. When people were talking about his journey, they could not speak directly saying "the King is travelling," but they had to speak in an indirect manner using such statements as "The country is on the move" – "The great hill is moving" – "The mystery is coming."³⁷ It is noteworthy that men also fled in terror from the wives of the Kyungu because they were not supposed to be tampered with.

Kyungu as a divine ruler was not supposed to fall ill. His health was very important for the well-being of his subjects. Even the slightest signs of sickness in the chief would send his nobles to smother him because it was a taboo for him to get sick. The king would then be buried in secrecy with some living persons to accompany him. A strong Kyungu meant a prosperous country, a good yield in the gardens and ability to ward off evil.³⁸ His life contained the fertility of the land, and his illness would have terrible effects for the land. His wives had no choice but to hide his sickness for fear of losing a husband.

There were occasions when the Ngonde could experience drought and widespread sickness. Whenever these occurred, they were believed to be caused by the anger either of some dead Kyungu or of the living one. In times of drought the nobles of the Ngonde would go to a diviner to enquire who it was who was angry; they would mention all the names of the

³⁵ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 45.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 46.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Owen Kalinga, *A History of the Ngonde Kingdom of Malawi*, Berlin: Mouton, 1985, p. 66.

departed Kyungus in turn and he would tell them that it was so and so. The Ngonde would then perform rituals to appease the angry Kyungu, some of which would include: building a house for the dead Kyungu (if the Kyungu was angry because they had omitted for so long to build or maintain his house), kill a beast and hang some of the meat up on a tree—the rest they would eat later outside the grove, and pouring out some beer and flour. Many times, in time of drought, they would build a house in the grove of the Kyungu whom the diviner had mentioned. But occasionally, if one of the chiefs had recently insulted the Kyungu, they concluded that it was the living Kyungu himself who was angry. In this case there would be no sacrifice in the grove at all, but the nobles of Ngonde would go to the one who insulted the Kyungu and charge him with it, asking him to pay a cow to the Kyungu to appease him.³⁹ The Kyungu did not himself sacrifice in the sacred groves but the nobles of Ngonde did so, with materials provided by him, and from these sacrifices the whole Ngondeland was believed to benefit. Insulting the Kyungu was not only treasonable, it was blasphemous, and the whole Ngonde area was believed to be cursed with drought or disease in return. It is worth noting that the idea of appeasing the ancestors when drought or other disasters strike still prevails, only that the anger of the living Kyungu no longer counts because divine kingship has ceased.

Changes about divine kingship started to be noted in the 1900s when Kyungu Mwakabanga, who died in 1904, took the reins of power. He was the first Kyungu to come out of seclusion to sit with his people judging cases; he appeared before them at his own homestead. None of his predecessors had done so, only the nobles of Ngonde had seen them. The subsequent Kyungus brought more changes of the custom. For example, when the Kyungu was traveling around, the tradition of running away from him was abandoned. One of the remarkable changes was when Peter Mwangalaba became Kyungu in 1932. He is the one who demystified the Kyunguship. He was the one who completed the emergence of the Kyungus from their religious seclusion at Mbande. He called off divine kingship, moved his headquarters from Mbande to Bwiba, which marked the dawn of the new era. Instead of looking at himself as a god, he regarded himself as a secular chief supported and controlled by the Nyasaland government. By 1939, 45% of the population professed Christianity and divine kingship

³⁹ Godfrey Wilson: *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Manchester University Press, 1939, p. 30.

ceased.⁴⁰ The influence of Christianity played a part in the vanishing of divine kingship.

An interview with *Mtemi gwa batemi*, paramount chief Kyungu (Lacky Maluluma Mwanyongo), shows that divine kingship is nonexistent. The paramount chief said that "that feeling is no longer there. I am a person just like anybody else."⁴¹ In the past, the king was not supposed to get sick because his sickness would affect the whole society. Today, the situation is different. When I went to the chief the first time, I did not find him at his place of residence because he had gone to the hospital at St. Mary's to receive treatment. His residence is no longer at Mbande; it is located in Mwambuli Village which is right at the centre of Karonga Boma. In the past, the Kyungu could not meet people, only *makambala* had access to him. This was part of the respect that was given to the chief. Today, things have changed so much that he meets people regularly. Besides, there is no enclosure around his house. But still there is a sign post written "*Palibe Njira*" (no passage) to try to show that his residence, in keeping with Ngonde culture, is not a common place. One cannot just wake up and make his way to the residence without following the appropriate procedure of meeting the *makambala* first before meeting the Kyungu. Even though the Kyungu's residence is located in Mwambuli Village, Mbande Hill still occupies a very important place in the Ngonde cosmology as it is the place where chiefs are traditionally installed and buried⁴² and the details will be discussed in the next chapter.

Spirits

To an African, the spirit world is a reality and alive with many different spirit beings. Mbiti describes spirits as belonging to two different categories: spirits that were once human beings and spirits that were created as such.⁴³ The Ngonde, like many African peoples, believe in the existence of spirits

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 71-72.

⁴¹ Int. Chief Kyungu (Lacky Maluluma Mwanyongo), Mwambuli Village, 3.3.2011.

⁴² It must be noted that burial of chiefs at Mbande was suspended for some years, and it resumed in 2011 when Kyungu Lacky Maluluma Mwanyongo died. – For more details see Moses Mlenga, *Polygamy in Northern Malawi. A Christian Reassessment*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2016, pp. 194-195.

⁴³ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, p. 102.

other than ancestor spirits. In Kyangonde, these are known as *Mapiri*.⁴⁴ People believe that these spirits exist even though they cannot see them. The spirits are believed to dwell in places such as graveyards, forests, in caves and on mountains or hills. In the past, it was believed that spirits dwelt in pools which were spread out in the Ngonde area. There were also mountain or hill spirits. Offerings were made to them by people who had to climb steep hill-sides.⁴⁵ Mwakanandi argues:

Since they are invisible their dwelling place could just be a matter of speculation. People believe in these spirits but they cannot tell with precision as to where these spirits come from. Some are of the opinion that they are created entities. But unlike the ancestral spirits, these spirits have never existed in physical form. Others hold the opinion that these spirits are of human origin.⁴⁶

For instance, it is widely believed that there is a big snake⁴⁷ in Chizindile (Kisindile) forest, which was a spirit that took a physical form. When asked as to whether anyone had ever seen the snake, many denied having seen it.

Prior to the establishment of the Kyungu kingdom, people believed in a Supreme Being, to whom was attributed the creation of the earth and all its inhabitants. Since God was detached from his people the only feasible way to have contact with him was through the help of an intermediary spirit whom, it was believed, took the physical form of a snake. The snake⁴⁸ took residence in several places: at Kambwe forest and the nearby pool, at Chibondo in southern Ngonde and at Filagule Hill, which is part of the highlands which form the western borders of the Karonga plain. The priority areas that the snake paid much attention to were health, wealth and the fertility of the land and the people.⁴⁹ The original snake was based at Kambwe in the village of Kisindile and the Mwenekisindile was the chief custodian of the ritual centre. Whenever there was an epidemic or natural disaster such as locusts, all the senior elders of the plain met at Kisindile where they prayed and made offerings—usually flour placed in a basket,

⁴⁴ Dolb Mwakanandi, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*, PhD, University of Stellenbosch, 1990, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 198.

⁴⁶ Dolb Mwakanandi, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*, PhD, University of Stellenbosch, 1990, p. 34.

⁴⁷ Among the Ngonde, there is a wide belief that spirits dwell in animals, and the snake is one of them.

⁴⁸ It is believed that there was a snake in each of the places mentioned.

⁴⁹ Owen Kalinga, *A History of the Ngonde Kingdom of Malawi*, Berlin: Mouton, 1985, pp. 40-41.

chicken and sometimes meat—to the spirit. Mwenekisindile, the ritual leader, was an important person in the area. Even though all the villages were politically independent under the leadership of clan heads, and though prayers that affect individual villages were said locally, the divine snake acted as a link to all the villages. All clans worshipped and appealed to the divine snake whenever there was discord in the created order, directed by the Mwenekisindile, the priest. It is noteworthy that the type of authority that was exercised among the Ngonde was religious, through the medium of the snake cult under the authority of the Kisindile especially in the Karonga plain.⁵⁰

Today, the chief custodian of this ritual centre is Ephron Mwambungu Mwanyesha, who leads prayers and makes offerings at Kisindile. He and some elders, including one woman, normally go there when disaster strikes, especially drought. During my field research, I learnt that Kisindile is both the name of the place/forest as well as the snake that resides in it, and there is notably a change in the pronunciation of the name. People normally call it "Chizindile" and not "Kisindile." More about this will be covered in the next chapter which discusses the Ngonde rituals.

In December 2009, Karonga district was hit by terrible earthquakes which caused a lot of damage in Ngondeland. There is a popular belief among the Ngonde that the earthquakes came because of Kayelekera Uranium Mining, since the mining is done around the Filagule Hill area, one of the Ngonde's traditional ritual centres. Tradition has it that in the process of mining, one of the snakes was killed and the other snake⁵¹ is angry and is looking for the one which was killed and as it moves around, it is causing earthquakes. At the time of research, it was rumoured that there were plans to sacrifice two children (by throwing them into Filagule Hill), a boy and a girl, to appease the angry snake (spirit).⁵² Apparently some forests were cleared in the process of mining and this is believed to have disturbed the created order.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 42.

⁵¹ It was previously stated that there is one snake in each of the ritual hills, however, some Ngonde believe that there are several snakes.

⁵² Int. James Simfukwe, Mwenitete Village, 20.11.2010. However, an interview with some of the community leaders showed that those rumours were unfounded.

Witchcraft

Witchcraft is one of the most common elements of Ngonde Traditional Religious beliefs. Belief in witchcraft is alive today as it used to be in the past. Mackenzie expresses it thus:

Belief in witchcraft fills the whole outlook of the common people. If one is persistently ill, and medicines do not cure him, he suspects some one of practicing against him; if children die one after the other, both parents cannot escape suspicion, one or other is guilty; if cattle do not give a normal quantity of milk, someone has bewitched them. And there is not a house in all heathen Konde-land that is not, in one way or another, or in many ways, protected by charms and medicines against the power of witchcraft.⁵³

To an African, the natural world is capable of being spiritually manipulated and people can interfere with it whenever they want to. For example, it is believed that human beings can hold the rain, can cause accidents, can cause electrical faults, can stop a car from moving, etc.⁵⁴ There is a belief in medicines, that is, in a mystical power residing in certain material substances which are used by those who have the necessary knowledge.

There is a belief in witchcraft, that is, an innate power to harm others exercised by certain individuals and in the mystical power of fellow villagers to punish wrongdoers. Some people have expressed doubt that witchcraft is not religious and therefore does not qualify to be listed as an element of African Traditional Religion. Renowned scholars think otherwise. Monica Wilson maintains that "It may be objected that belief in witchcraft is in no sense 'religious', but to exclude discussion of it in an account of the Ngonde religion is comparable to excluding a reference to the devil in a discussion of Christianity."⁵⁵ Evil is a reality which must be interpreted in one way or another. Witchcraft should be treated as an element of religion and Wendland and Hachibamba give two reasons why this should be so. First, they argue that it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a sharp line of distinction between what is viewed as being 'witchcraft' and other beliefs concerning the unseen powers and forces that affect one's daily life – or death. Secondly, by definition 'religion' "concerns the belief in a divine or

⁵³ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 251.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 237.

⁵⁵ Monica Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa*, London: Oxford University Press, 1957. Mbiti also argues that belief in witchcraft is religion, see John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, pp. 259-260.

superhuman power or powers to be obeyed or worshipped. Granted that 'worship' in the normal sense may not be involved in witchcraft and while its practitioners are not regarded as being 'divine', there is certainly a great deal of fearful 'obedience' that is observed with respect to the 'superhuman powers' that are manifested in and about the operation of witchcraft."⁵⁶

Godfrey Wilson, writing in the 1930s, described the Ngonde as "a recently primitive people whose life was lived within very narrow horizons of space, whose religion is combined with magic and witchcraft."⁵⁷ This shows that he saw witchcraft as one of the core beliefs of the Ngonde. Many people fear it, and many are likely to employ it at some time in their lives. This is usually done in order to get back at someone or because of jealousy. Sometimes it is used as a moral check, especially when it comes to '*Kigune*'⁵⁸ as a type of witchcraft.

Witchcraft is a reality among the Ngonde. It is believed that there are impersonal supernatural forces or powers which certain people can control and manipulate to achieve certain results. These powers are mysterious and totally hidden to the ordinary man. Magic can be either good or bad magic, what Gehman refers to as black and white magic.⁵⁹ While white magic brings positive effects, black magic is evil and brings negative effects on individuals. The Ngonde call witchcraft *bulosi*. It is believed that those involved in witchcraft use magic to perform their activities. The power of witchcraft is believed to be inherited, rarely acquired; but the power of defence is both inherited and increased by drinking medicines.⁶⁰ Monica Wilson writes that all chiefs have witchcraft power to defend the land. This is basically good, but it is witchcraft nevertheless, and the lines between defence and attack may not always be clear.

⁵⁶ Ernst Wendland and Salimo Hachibamba, *Galu Wamkota: Missiological Reflections from South-Central Africa*, Zomba: Kachere, 2007, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Godfrey Wilson: *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Manchester University Press, 1939, p. 5.

⁵⁸ *Kigune* is a type of witchcraft which is used to bring a curse on someone who has done something which is not acceptable to the elders or the community.

⁵⁹ Richard Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1993.

⁶⁰ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 66. Witchcraft can in fact be acquired, bought or "caught" (Laurenti Magesa, *Africa Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Nairobi: Paulines, 1997, p. 168).

Belief in witchcraft among the Ngonde is as strong as it used to be in the past though some of the things that used to happen to show that witchcraft exists are vanishing. The missionaries tried to fight the belief in witchcraft and they were not successful, nor were the Ngonde ministers after them. The belief in witchcraft exists even with the introduction of Christianity, education and western civilization. Many Ngonde constantly live in fear of being bewitched and nearly every sickness, death or misfortune is interpreted by many as being caused by the works of witches and wizards. Sometimes "the witches" are seen as a general and quite anonymous evil force. At other times the sufferer, with the help of a diviner, will be keen to identify the witch, usually a relative. In the process of my research, many explained that natural sicknesses and natural deaths are rare,⁶¹ but most of them are caused by witchcraft and that is why people have to visit traditional healers when sickness, misfortune or death strike.

It is important to point out that in the area of witchcraft, the Ngonde were famous for a specific type of witchcraft called *kigune*, which was common in the 1970s,⁶² in which it was believed that some had the ability to use magic to remove bones from offenders. *Kigune* could normally occur when a Ngonde senior was aggrieved by a junior and would deal with him or her magically by removing bones. Rumours had it that bones could be removed from the joints of an individual and what would remain was a pile of flesh. But what I learnt during research is that *bokhobola malundi na maboko* (they break the knees and elbows through magic) so that the one who is cursed is unable to walk again. An individual would become paralyzed. A candidate for *kigune* was someone who was not cooperative (*wa matata*), and lacked respect. Elders could inflict pain on such an individual. For example, in the past, those cycling bicycles had to give appropriate respect to elders (*mafumu*) by getting off the bike when passing by places where the elders were seated. In addition, one had to remove a hat from his head (if he was putting one on), as a sign of respect. From the look of things, *kigune* was one way of instilling values in people. Good behaviour was of essence in Ngonde culture. Some elders were lenient enough as to give a warning to those who decided not to give due respect by holding the bicycle in the same place for as long as they wished. One could cycle for a long time without getting anywhere. If they decided to release him to pass

⁶¹ This was also the case among the Chewa of Lilongwe. Clement Mmana, *Perceptions of Death in African Perspective: A Case Study of Likuni Parish*, MA Module, Mzuzu University, 2009.

⁶² Int. Isaac Mwakanandi, Mwangomba Village, 20.11.2010.

by, he would fall down first, and would be instructed to leave immediately and admonished not to do it again. There were times when elders would know who, amongst them, was holding the bicycle. T.A. Karonga mentioned that at one point, an elder told his friend, "*We Mwandepeka*⁶³ *muleka mwana abukeghe*" (You Mwandepeka allow the child to go). Indeed, the concerned elder would release the cyclist and that is the time when he would fall down and then be told to go after having been admonished not to repeat his rudeness.⁶⁴

In other cases, those offended would remove parts from the body of the offender. One respondent said that "the removal of bones was spiritual and not physical."⁶⁵ It is noteworthy that one person could not pronounce *kigune* on another person (especially the one which involved removal of bones), but three to five people. Each one could keep the body parts by using magic. The cursed person could not walk for one or two years. If one of the people who kept the parts died, healing would become a problem. Forgiveness would also be a problem. Healing was possible when one apologized and underwent a ritual. The rituals were of different kinds, but what was common in all the rituals was the fact that the cursed person had to pay a cow, and the use of a walking stick.

In the first kind of ritual, the cow would be slaughtered, its blood sprinkled on the knees of the affected person who then was given a walking stick and was told to walk. If all the people who kept the parts were alive, the person could walk.⁶⁶ If one of them had died before the restoration process, the individual would become lame, *wakulumala*.⁶⁷ Mwamatope however pointed out that the cow was like a fine; people took advantage of the situation so that they could eat beef (*kuburyero waka*) because they did not need a whole cow for the ritual. While the first type of restoration involved the sprinkling of blood on the knees of the affected person, the second type involved the members of the community who threw bones on the affected person. Two informants, who witnessed the restoration ritual which is commonly known as *lusayo*, as they were growing up, mentioned that on

⁶³ Not real name.

⁶⁴ Int. Wilford Mwamatope (T.A. Karonga), Mwamatope Village, 22.11.2010.

⁶⁵ Int. Ambere Mwenitete, Mwenitete Village, 20.11.2010.

⁶⁶ It was believed that those who kept the body parts utilized magic to return the parts they kept, and had to be present during the ritual. If one of those who kept a part had died before the ritual was performed, the victim would not gain full recovery.

⁶⁷ Int. Wilford Mwamatope (T.A. Karonga), Mwamatope Village, 22.11.2010.

the day of the ritual, elders invited people, a cow was slaughtered and everyone was expected to eat it, but people were not allowed to "chew" the bones. They were instructed to eat all the flesh and put the bones in one place. When the eating was over, people were instructed to throw the bones at the victim while the elders were speaking the following words: "*Uswe lino munyitu uyu tukuya pakumbwesyekesya fifupa fyo twamweghile* (we are restoring the bones that we removed from him). *Uwe Nyamuka!* (Get up!), *Ingiri iyi!* (Here is the walking stick), *Enda!* (Walk), *lekesha ngiri!* throw away the walking stick, (*Enda!*) Walk! Immediately, the individual would walk. Those present during the ritual were then advised not to come back to the person to harm him again.

It is vital to note that *kigune* may have different results:

- a) *Kulumala* (deformity), where one would be unable to walk due to pains in the legs or spine.
- b) *Kuba chikonyofu* (behave like one who is out of his mind), behave like a "zombie." Mr. A.K.M. shared a story of a cousin to his wife who he said was a victim of this magical act called *kigune*. She was rude to her aunt and her aunt was always complaining about her behaviour. Her aunt used the magical act to deal with her and she had a problem of defecating everywhere. When she got married her husband had to take her back to her home because of this problem.
- c) *Strange illnesses or occurrences*, for instance, inexplicable illnesses, barrenness and other misfortunes.

Others could be victims of *kigune* just because they did not slaughter a cow during a funeral of their father or mother or other close grown up relatives. It is common practice in Ngondeland to slaughter a cow during funerals of adults. For example, in the 1980s, Mr. Mwangwewo⁶⁸ slaughtered a pig because he did not have cows at home, and did not have money to buy a cow, when his father died. The elders and the people were not happy with this. The cow was ideal during a function like this one. Through magic, his bones were removed (*boyaba fifupa*) and he was unable to walk or sit. The only thing he could do was just to lie down. Slaughtering a cow was necessary because funerals were also regarded as occasions for feasting.

One person in Mpata area fell victim to the practice of *kigune* after beating his wife in the presence of elders which showed that he had no regard for them. The wife had offended her husband and when the husband charged

⁶⁸ Int. Arnold Mwangwewo, Mwakasangila Village, 21.8.2010.

and wanted to beat her, she ran to the place where traditional dances were taking place for safety. Her husband followed her there and beat her severely. The elders tried to stop him but he would not listen. They became angry because they felt that he had underrated them. Immediately he arrived home, he started feeling powerless (without strength) and he could not walk. From that day, he could hardly do anything by himself. His relatives had to bath him, and do everything for him. He was taken to a traditional healer by the name Muzgoka, who told him to go and apologize to the elders for what he did. As was the practice, he was asked to pay a cow as a fine. Restoration took place as explained above, and he was able to walk again. However, he did not live long after restoration, he died after six months. Some believed that some people went away with the bones; that is why he did not live long. Others speculated that some people stole the meat that had bones in it.⁶⁹

Today, many people believe that the magical act of *kigune* has vanished and is no longer practised. However, others believe that it is still happening especially in the Mpata area, the area which is very famous for this particular practice. It is important to note that the practice of '*kigune*' was common in some areas and not in others. Areas which were said to be famous for this practice were Chiwondo, Mlare, Mpata-Mwenitete, and Ngerenge-Mwaulambo area. One can still find some remnants of this type of witchcraft in these areas.

A different kind of witchcraft practised among the Ngonde is the one in which people turn others into labourers under the pretext that they are dead. Those who are said to have been killed are believed to have been employed by witches/wizards⁷⁰ to sell things in groceries, work in farms or maize mills or steal things from other people. These are known by different names among the Ngonde: *Ndondosha* or *majini*. *Majini* or *ndondosha* are people like things which help those in businesses to get rich, farmers to have plenty of yield, to get protection from enemies and the like. A story is told of a man who had a *jini/ndondosha* in the house selling groceries. His wife was instructed not to open a certain room in his house. One day, the curious wife decided to open the room while the husband was away. Upon opening, she found a person believed to have been dead, alive. The

⁶⁹ Int. Eliam Kasunga, Mwenitete Village, 28.3.2011.

⁷⁰ It must be noted that not all who use *ndondosha* or *majini* are witches/wizards. Some are given these things by traditional healers so that they prosper in their business or other endeavours. This kind of witchcraft could be referred to as *kupanda* in Kyangonde or *kukhwima* in Chichewa.

moment she opened the room the person fell down and that was the time her husband collapsed where he was. He is now paralyzed and he tells the story himself. He regrets to have been involved in such kind of activity.

Another type of witchcraft is the one in which people believe that witches harbour snakes in their bellies. These snakes are believed to give the witches the power of witchcraft. They call them *njoka sya mbungulu* (*pythons*). These snakes are inherited from parents and this process takes place at birth.⁷¹ Another category of people who are believed to have a python in their belly are chiefs because it gives them power to see and fight witches. The python in the belly is the source of the chief's mystical power.⁷²

The Ngonde generally believe that there is power in witchcraft. For instance, in October 1997, there was a funeral in Mwenitete village. The kinsmen could not agree on the burial place and quarreled for some time. When time came for burial, the vehicle that carried the coffin could not move because it was tied by magic, just like a bicycle is not allowed to move in *kigune*. They had to talk the issue over. After they had talked, the vehicle could move and then burial took place.⁷³

The belief in witchcraft is still strong so that even electrical faults are attributed to witches and wizards.⁷⁴ This also reminds me of what happened to our family in 1983. After serving in the Army for a considerable number of years, my father decided to build a house in the village. When the house reached roof-level, there was a strong wind and the house collapsed. This was attributed to witchcraft. We were told that people were not happy that my father was building a house of burnt bricks, roofed with iron sheets. Another thing that people used as evidence that it was the work of witchcraft was that the house fell on the side where the wind was blowing from, instead of where it was blowing to.⁷⁵ This was a puzzle to many. These and many other stories show that belief in witchcraft is still alive, although Godfrey Wilson, writing in 1939 seems to suggest that it was

⁷¹ Dolb Mwakanandi, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*, PhD, University of Stellenbosch, 1990, p. 36.

⁷² This belief is refusing to die. Monica Wilson also observed it many years ago, see her *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 57.

⁷³ Int. James Simfukwe, Mwenitete Village, 20.11.2011.

⁷⁴ Int. Isaac Mwakanandi, Mwangomba Village, 20.11.2010.

⁷⁵ There is a possibility that people were not really sure of the direction of the wind but they just wanted to justify their belief.

going to decline "And even the belief in witchcraft, which has proved in many parts of Africa to be most persistent, is beginning in Ngonde to be publicly called in question by some of the pagans themselves."⁷⁶ The situation on the ground does not suggest that witchcraft is declining, as everything, including the HIV and AIDS pandemic, is believed to result from witchcraft attacks.

Healing

The Ngonde do believe in traditional healing and use traditional medicine quite often. World Health Organization defines traditional medicine as

the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.⁷⁷

The term traditional healer covers a number of different types such as herbalists, diviners, and traditional doctors.⁷⁸ However, among the Ngonde, there are two major types of traditional healers namely, the *mughanga* or *ng'anga* and *Nchimi*. The term *ng'anga* is the one that is commonly used, as opposed to *mughanga*, and is liberally used to refer to anyone who practices healing through any form of traditional medicine, whether she is a diviner or herbalist, though at times they tend to be specific. What is common between these two categories is that they both practice herbal medicine but the *ng'anga* does not engage in divination or may partly engage in simple divination by means of mechanical aids while the *nchimi* does divination through being possessed by powers originating either directly from God or his intermediaries or ancestral spirits.⁷⁹ It is noteworthy that *nchimi* can also be used to mean prophet.

J.C. Chakanza has identified three broad categories of traditional healers depending on the way they carry out their healing practice. These are the herbalist, the diviner and the local spirit medium. The herbalist (*wa-*

⁷⁶ Godfrey Wilson: *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Manchester University Press, 1939, p. 74.

⁷⁷ *Traditional Medicine: Definitions*, [http://www.who.int/medicines/ areas/traditionaldefinitions/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/medicines/areas/traditionaldefinitions/en/index.html) (23.2.2009).

⁷⁸ Chimwemwe Mtisunge Harawa-Katumbi, *The Interaction between Christianity and Traditional Medicine in Livingstonia Synod*, MA, University of Malawi, 2003, p. 47.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

zitsamba) deals with medicinal herbs and roots and gives them out after simple and straightforward examination, which does not include divination. The diviner (*sing'anga waula*) consults an oracle or uses a gourd to consult his ancestors or uses some other means of divination. The local spirit medium (*sing'anga wa mizimu*) does his work by getting possessed by a spirit.⁸⁰ Even though this is the case, divination is of different kinds, one utilizes mechanical aids, and the other requires that the diviner be possessed. There is always a challenge to distinguish the various categories because they overlap. However, there seems to be a clear demarcation between a *ng'anga* and *nchimi* in Kyangonde usage, and that is why some traditional healers are called *Nchimi* and others are not. For example, Chikanga is normally referred to as *nchimi* (diviner) and not just *ng'anga*.⁸¹ In addition, when it comes to the cleansing of a village by *ng'anga*, traditional chiefs would not invite an herbalist to do that job, but instead they would look for a diviner.

Traditional healers and diviners are the only source of help in a life experience filled with witchcraft activities that people live in fear of. The traditional healer has a special relationship with the spiritual world that society needs to deal with, especially with the ever present consequences of being bewitched. The social authority and power of a diviner is validated by his ability to "enter" the spirit world. The diviner can discern, by consulting the ancestral spirits, the one who has brought harm through the use of witchcraft *bulosi*. Mackenzie uses the term "foreteller"⁸² to refer to diviners and he distinguishes two categories of foretellers: *abakunguluka* and *abakomwa malagho*. *Abakunguluka* were those who had power to see in dreams the impending danger to the chief or the community. The term *kukunguluka* means to go down or to fall down; to sink deep; and the *ukunguluka* was the man who would go down, in dreams, to the underworld, to obtain the message that he was to convey to the chief. The main responsibility of these men was to protect the chief from unseen dangers. The *ukunguluka* was capable of seeing anything in dreams, that posed a threat to the chief, such as witchcraft, illness, danger from animals, and steps were taken to fight off the danger.⁸³ The second category of

⁸⁰ J.C. Chakanza, "Traditional Healers (Asing'anga) in Malawi: Any Prospects for them," in *Lamp Magazine*, no. 20, November to December 1999.

⁸¹ Boston Soko, *Nchimi Chikanga: The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008, p. 16.

⁸² Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 216

⁸³ Ibid.

foretellers was the *abakomwa malagho*, a phrase which may be translated as "spirit-possessed persons or trance-seers." They would foretell the future by means of an indwelling spirit, but the occupation was always temporary.⁸⁴

Having mentioned those two categories, it is important to note that there is a different kind of possession in which evil spirits take possession of a human being as a dwelling-place.⁸⁵ It may as well be said that spirit possession may be for better or for worse.⁸⁶ Silas Ncozana believes that *abakomwa malagho* are an equivalent to *nchimi* in Tumbuka.⁸⁷ It must be noted that the term *abakomwa malagho* is rarely used among the Ngonde, the commonly used word is *inchimi* or *injimi* which means diviner. The word *injimi* is closely related to *injosi* which means dreams in Kyangonde, which implies that there is a relationship between these two. The relationship may come in because traditionally, a diviner is expected to dream (*kughogha injosi*) because she is able to tell her client things that are true even though she is meeting him for the first time. Conversely, it could be said that she dreams because all these things are revealed to her through dreams, that is why she is known as *injimi*, the one who dreams. Generally, divination links the physical and the spiritual worlds.

People normally consult diviners to find out who is responsible for misfortune, illness or death. Divining is resorted to primarily in cases of illness to find the cause and recommend the cure. In addition, one may require information about lost or stolen goods; and some want to know if their hunting and fishing expeditions will be successful, or the reason why the gardens yield a poor crop, etcetera.⁸⁸ Illnesses may be attributable to three things: natural causes, and by implication God, witchcraft, and anger of the spirits.⁸⁹ Natural illnesses are easily cured when treated without the involvement of too many rituals. Those caused by witchcraft are overcome

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 222.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Silas Ncozana, *The Spirit Dimension in African Christianity: A Pastoral Study among the Tumbuka People of Northern Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2002, p. 96.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 82. Spirit possession is generally referred to as *vimbuza* which has three different types: *vimbuza*, *virombo* and *vyanusi*. See Boston Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2014.

⁸⁸ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 227.

⁸⁹ This is not particular to the Ngonde alone, but the Chewa also. See J.W.M. van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2001.

by the use of both herbs and rituals. When the anger of the spirits brings diseases, it becomes necessary to deal with the cause of their anger first, before the patient can be cured; otherwise no doctor can succeed in curing the illness.⁹⁰ So whenever the traditional healers are dealing with cases of illness, they first of all attempt to find out the cause so that proper medication and ritual could be administered.

In cases of illness, people want to know *who* caused the illness in order to get back at someone. When the diviner discovers the one who used witchcraft to harm another, he/she may even write a letter of accusation which is then read in the village. The one accused may be banished from the village. An incident happened in Mwahimba village where one woman was accused of bewitching a certain member of her family who then visited a diviner. The diviner sent the complainant back to bring the one who was accused of bewitching him. The accused was brought and the diviner put a big cross on her forehead (using a knife), and was given a letter which was read in the village. The woman confessed to practicing witchcraft and was banished from the village. The work of the diviner is generally to avert misfortune which may present itself in various forms.

Various materials and objects are used during divination. Some use stones, gourds, bones and a pestle. These are manipulated to come up with answers to problems that clients raise.⁹¹ It is important to note that a diviner may prescribe certain charms that ward off evil as well. The charms may be worn or be implanted inside the body through cuts that he makes. These are basically for protection against sickness and any other harm. In addition, traditional medicines are also prescribed for healing purposes. The medicine could be in form of roots, herbs, powders, etc.

Mention should be made that although the Ngonde do consult *ng'anga* and *nchimi* when problems strike, many of them do possess a wide knowledge of the uses of herbs. There are some ailments which do not require the services of a diviner or a traditional healer. For example simple sicknesses such as toothache, headache or cough or cold can be treated at home using herbs that are commonly known. This is what is referred to as remedial medicine (*unkota goponesya*). The traditional healer has no monopoly of such plants. Even some local people know a plant two as medicine.

⁹⁰ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 275-276.

⁹¹ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, p. 221.

Traditional healers, especially diviners, are religious leaders in a way because they link the physical and the spiritual worlds. They enter into the spiritual where an ordinary person cannot. Whatever they do has religious connotations.

Much of the troubles which afflict people are believed to be due to the interference of spirits and the Konde doctor will consult them as part at least, if not the whole, of his diagnosis. He is in touch with the sources of the trouble. Both the gathering of herbs, and the administration of the medicine, is a religious act.⁹²

Mackenzie records two prayers, one used when gathering herbs and another, when medicine is being administered. When gathering herbs, the traditional healer would pray:

Be merciful to me, thou Creator. The medicine which I am seeking is the same that my fathers sought, and it was thou that didst open their eyes. Show me the roots, and I shall know them. But if my patient is not to recover, hide them from me, and I shall know that it is thy will.⁹³

The following prayer, which Mackenzie calls a statement, is used when medicine is being administered: "If this disease has come from God, medicine will heal it; for God, who made us, made also the trees and gave us intelligence to know their properties. But if it has come from men, I cannot heal it."⁹⁴ On the one hand, this attests to the fact that apart from ancestors, God is also involved in the healing process of those who are sick. But on the other hand, it appears that it was fashionable to mention the name God in almost everything by both pagans and Christians as Monica Wilson observed:

Kyala is an overriding power to which the shades, witches, and medicines are subject. 'The medicine will be effective if Kyala wills'; 'rain will fall when the rain-maker soaks his stones if Kyala wills'; 'when the doctor treats the tails they "vomit" (froth over), then if Kyala has helped us the cattle give much milk'.⁹⁵

This shows the traditional doctors are aware of the fact that even the medicines are subject to God's power and that his good will is required if healing is to take place.

⁹² Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 272.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 273.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 158.

Another factor that demonstrates that healing has religious connotations is that religious songs called *makwaya*⁹⁶ are employed. The choirs use traditional instruments called *visekese* and instead of clapping hands, they hold pieces of wood which, when brought together, produce a clap. The songs that I collected from the diviners who use choirs show that they are a mixture of religious hymns and songs of *misyu* (spirits).⁹⁷ The diviners I have interviewed use choirs for various reasons. First, choirs assist them to be connected to the spirits so that they are able to carry out the divination exercise. The singing helps the diviner to be possessed because without it he would not be in a position to know what is happening in the spirit world. Even when he is possessed, the choir continues to sing so that he 'keeps' being possessed throughout the session of 'searching' his clients.⁹⁸ Second, the singing is needed so that people do not hear what the diviner is saying to his client. The information is intended to be private, only a few people, especially those close to the *nchimi*, may know. Lastly, the singing has a healing effect to the diviner. For example, Lucia Nyandovi said that she becomes very sick when many days pass without hearing the choir sing for her. It is as if the spirits make her sick and they require being placated.⁹⁹

Death and Burial

Whoever is born into this world expects one rite of passage which—death. Death does occur among the Ngonde, but whenever it occurs, it is important to find the reason or who caused it. This is true even today. Burial of the deceased is sometimes delayed for days just because relatives to the deceased want to find out who killed him/her especially when one suspects some foul play. Mary¹⁰⁰ shared a story that happened in 1999. When her uncle, who was a pastor of Christian Love Church,¹⁰¹ died, the family members suspected that he had been bewitched by his own father. Such being the case, burial was delayed by three days because they needed

⁹⁶ Boston Soko believes that the term *makwaya* is a corruption of the English word 'choir' and it is said to have been introduced for the first time by *Nchimi* Chikanga, who revolutionized divination procedures so much so that today most diviners have adopted the practice. For more details on *makwaya*, see Boston Soko, *Nchimi Chikanga: The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008, pp. 59-67.

⁹⁷ For the songs, refer to the appendix.

⁹⁸ Int. Mickwell Mogha, Mwakasoko Village, 4.3.2011.

⁹⁹ Int. Lucia Nyandovi, Gwebwe Village, 18.12.2011.

¹⁰⁰ Not her real name.

¹⁰¹ This is one of the budding Charismatic Churches in Karonga.

to visit the diviner to find out 'who' had killed the deceased. The diviner gave the members a charm called *chilandabusi* popularly known as "round us." They were told to bury the deceased with the charm and whoever had a hand in his death would die seven days after the burial of the deceased. After the burial of the Christian Love Church Pastor, people were eagerly expecting the death of the 'witch' as they would have it, but the seven days elapsed but the man they suspected was still alive. He died in 2001 of other ailments.

As with many African peoples, death among the Ngonde does not signify the end of life, but it means relocation from one world to another. The dead continue to live on but in a different sphere. This is the main reason why the Ngonde give a decent burial to their dead. This also explains why the shades (*abasyuka*) of the dead were and still are of great importance to the Ngonde. Appropriate funeral services have to be conducted if people want to live peacefully after burying the dead. Neglect of the proper form in funeral services can lead to illness or people would lack peace due to frequent visits of the spirits of the dead. The main function of the funeral ceremony is to produce a certain distance between the living and the dead.¹⁰²

When one dies, he passes to a sphere in which he is clothed with fresh powers, which for better or for worse can be directed upon his living descendants, who must take care to give no cause for offence. He cannot, however, punish them for any evil they may have done to him while alive; only post mortem sins can be visited upon them: neglect of ceremonies, omission of his name when prayer is made and other signs of forgetfulness. And the power to harm of each spirit is limited to his own descendants; but chiefs, naturally, can bring misfortune upon the whole of the community over which they ruled in life.

During funerals, ordinary Ngonde were buried with their bodies wound up in mats made from banana stems locally known as *minyasi* and in ordinary graves. Today, due to modernization, their bodies are placed in coffins. The royal family had its own type of funeral ceremony. During the burial ceremony which takes place at night, only noble selected men could be present. No woman could be present even if she was from the royal family.

¹⁰² Monica Wilson explains that contact with the shades (spirits of the dead) is feared and the function of the death rites is "'to drive the shade away'... With the shades they desire no close contact." See Monica Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa*, London: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 17.

Not much has changed in the burial of members of the royal family because they are still buried at night. In the past, burial involved cutting the dead person from all connection with earthly matters. His mats were buried with him; his bananas were cut down, his hoes were taken to the grave and broken, while all baskets and pots were destroyed and left to rot there. The goods were destroyed so that they would go with him to the land of the spirits. This process is referred to by Mackenzie as "disinheriting" the dead person.¹⁰³ There was a wide belief among the Ngonde that a dead body was not supposed to cast a shadow; if it did, it was a sign that the spirit of the dead was still lingering around, and if it was not kept away, another member of the family would die soon. The most effective way of sending the dead person off to his proper resting place was to burn his body.¹⁰⁴ Most of these things have ceased.

In the past, all who took any part in the burying were required to wash in running water, to get rid of all the contamination, especially of the disease which killed the deceased. The Ngonde also believed that they washed away the spirits with the water. In the past they used to mourn for up to three months, but these days, they mourn up to seven days. When the mourning is over, close relatives of the dead person shave their heads. Even today, after burial, many people do wash their hands. Some families have their members wash their hands with water mixed with herbs right at the tomb, soon after burial.¹⁰⁵

Taboos

Taboos form an integral part of Ngonde cosmology and these take care of the moral aspects of the religion. Hutton Webster describes taboos as systems of prohibitions with regard to certain persons, things, acts or situations. The objects considered as taboo are perceived to contain within them a certain assumed danger that always has implications for anyone who contravenes the taboo. "The danger need not be explained, and in many cases it is not; neither is it perceptible to the senses, but it is there, and sooner or later the consequences of transgression will come to pass."¹⁰⁶ It is for this reason that taboos have great moral authority. A taboo is a prohibition or restriction for particular reasons which cannot be defied without self-destruction. If the restriction is disobeyed, people believe that

¹⁰³ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 295.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. pp. 294-295.

¹⁰⁵ Int. Twitike Mwabungulu, Katolola Village, 11.3.2011.

¹⁰⁶ Hutton Webster, *Taboo: A Sociological Study*, New York: Octagon, 1973, p. 13.

it may harm the offender or the society.¹⁰⁷ The implication is that only certain ways of doing things are safe while other ways bring disaster, thus they must be guarded against. A taboo may also refer to something set aside as sacred so that it is forbidden to use or exploit. Hence a taboo is the established belief of what is considered to be mysterious, dangerous or improper to do or to say.¹⁰⁸

There are numerous taboos in Traditional Religion and often people do not know the proper explanation behind them. People adhere to certain prescriptions because their ancestors did it or because it is their custom. However, taboos play a significant role in the ethical duty of transmitting and preserving life. The breach of taboos endangers the health and wellbeing of society. Taboos relate to matters of death, corpses, sacred persons etc. Among numerous taboos concerning sexuality, the most significant are the taboos against sexual intercourse during menstruation and after menopause,¹⁰⁹ and the taboos against incest. The taboos are aimed at preserving and prolonging life.

Many of these taboos are religious and that is why they fall under African Traditional Religions. Laurenti Magesa observes:

Taboos connect human life and the benevolence of creation to humanity. As such, they are an essential feature of the moral perception of African Religion. Beyond that, they indicate the relationship between humanity and the living God, from whom the gift of life ultimately originates; they also indicate the relationship between humanity and the ancestors, who are life's immediate

¹⁰⁷ Mary Tew, *Peoples of the Lake Nyasa Region*, London: Oxford, 1950, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸ Dolb Mwakanandi, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*, PhD, University of Stellenbosch, 1990, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ *Mbulu*, a swelling formed from the accumulation of sperms in a woman's womb may result from sexual unions after a woman has attained menopause. There are varying views among the Ngonde women on when exactly one may get *mbulu*. There are some who believe that one only gets it if, after menopause, one sleeps with a young man, but may not get it when she continues to have sex with her 'aged' husband. It is believed that the sperms of the aged husband are weak and may not be harmful, but those of the young man are still strong and may cause harm. – For more details and more variants of belief see: Bonet Kamwela, *Mbulu as a Pastoral Problem in Mzimba in the Northern Malawi*, BTh, University of Livingstonia, 2013. – In other areas of Malawi there is no taboo on sex after menopause: See Chimwemwe Kalalo, *Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Context of HIV/Aids: The Involvement of the Anglican Church in the Upper Shire Diocese in Southern Malawi*, MA, University of Malawi, 2006.

mediators. Thus, for example, though rain emanates from God, it "can be controlled by human agency through the medium of ancestral spirits," and when these have been wronged by transgression of a taboo, proper procedures of atonement must be initiated so that God's gifts may flow once again in abundance for the benefit of the life of humanity.¹¹⁰

There are certain things which were prohibited among the Ngonde, which they called *mwiko*. These were things that were forbidden because they were disgraceful, wicked, inappropriate and inconvenient. The Ngonde had no explanation of these prohibitions except that they were handed down from the fathers.¹¹¹ Some of the examples of taboos as recorded by Mackenzie were as follows: to use the name of God or that of the chief unnecessarily in taking an oath, a daughter was to avoid addressing her father in-law by name, nor a husband his mother in law; some parts of the body could not be named, it was a taboo to see chief Kyungu, a woman should not sweep at night, she would be driving off her ancestors; don't cut hair at night, because the spirits cut their hair at night, don't sit in the doorway at night you take the place of the spirits, don't clap hands at night, for the spirits do so, and imitation might be regarded by them as mockery, not flattery. The saliva was sacred, and was often used in religious ceremonies; but to spit upon someone was a taboo. A few of these taboos have disappeared, while many are still upheld today.

In addition, there are sexual taboos that the Ngonde observed. For example, it was a taboo for a husband and wife to have sexual intercourse after the birth of a child, otherwise the husband might become sick, and could possibly die. The death could result from his contact with blood discharges of the woman. In fact, after delivery, the husband was required to sleep in a separate bedroom or place. Furthermore the woman was not supposed to be involved in any kind of cooking until 'she was well'; free of any blood discharge. This was done in order to avoid swelling of those who might eat food cooked by her. The woman was considered defiled and therefore not fit to touch fire and food stuffs. The same was also true when the woman was experiencing her menstruation. Couples had to abstain from sexual intercourse at all cost.¹¹² All this is still happening today, though some people among the Ngonde are neglecting some of these beliefs due to the influence of education and Christianity. The idea behind all this is to

¹¹⁰ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1997, p. 142.

¹¹¹ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 95.

¹¹² Int. Mwakiyo Malema, Village Headman, Mwakiyo Village, 1.5.2011.

safeguard life. Joseph DeGabriele believes that taboos are used for moral purposes, although he observes that the victims are often not the "transgressors."¹¹³ This is similar to what happens among the Ngonde. For example, if one who is sexually active carries a new born baby, it is the baby, and not the one carrying the baby, who will be sick or die due to *mioto*, an equivalent of *mdulo*.

Traditional healers also have to abstain from sex especially when they are about to meet their clients. One diviner I interviewed explained that one cannot have sex and then go ahead to touch the medicine that would be given to a client. If that happens, the medicine would not work. If sexual relations take place,¹¹⁴ she would not touch the medicine, but instead she would send her assistant to do that.¹¹⁵ She is of the belief that sexual relations make one unclean and therefore not fit to administer medicine. During periods of drought, the priest and all those who lead prayers through the ancestors do abstain from sexual relations on the day they go to Chisindile for prayers. It is a taboo not to do so.¹¹⁶

Another sexual taboo that is observed is the incest taboo. It is *mwiko* (forbidden) to sleep with a blood relative. The Ngonde are not expected to have sexual relations with one's own parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, nieces and nephews, brother-in-law or sister-in-law. The reasons for incest taboo are not clearly explained, but people just state that it is forbidden.¹¹⁷ Some Ngonde elders I interacted with believe that members of the same clan share the same blood and as such it is forbidden to sleep with someone who has the same blood as yours. When it

¹¹³ Joseph DeGabriele, *When Pills don't Work – African Illnesses, Misfortune and Mdulo, Religion in Malawi*, No. 9, 1999, pp. 9-23.

¹¹⁴ She narrated that sometimes her husband demands that she sleeps with her right before she goes to meet the patients. Having sex at night was not a problem, but having it during the day made her not operate to full capacity.

¹¹⁵ Int. name withheld, Mwakasoko Village, 4.3.2011.

¹¹⁶ Int. Ephron Mwanyesha, ritual leader, Mwanyesha Village, 5.3.2011.

¹¹⁷ It appears that much emphasis is placed on the consequences of unacceptable sexual relations. The reasons for observing incest taboo are not so much highlighted. For instance, when Monica Wilson asked the Ngonde why marriage between relatives was objected, one of the reasons she got was "If kin married 'people were astonished' and therefore barrenness or madness was feared. Some illnesses are thought to have resulted from marrying relatives." Monica Wilson, *For Men and Elders: Change in the Relations of Generations and of Men and Women among the Nyakyusa-Ngonde People 1875-1971*, New York: Africana, 1977, p. 107.

comes to incest concerning a parent and a child or a grandparent and a grandchild, it is believed that 'a parent is eating his or her own vomit' which is unacceptable; in fact, it is defiling.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the religious background of the Ngonde. The Ngonde were and still are very religious, immersed in beliefs in God, the spirits (including ancestral) and witchcraft. God is supreme over all, but in addition, natural spirits and ancestral spirits form an integral part of their cosmology. All these are invoked in times of natural disasters and epidemics both at family and community level. Even the healing process requires their involvement, regardless of the nature of the illness; be it natural or caused by witchcraft. Communication about stolen goods or impending danger comes from them. In all of the Ngonde's undertakings, all these come into play. Some of the beliefs have died down while others still prevail even among Christians.

¹¹⁸ A child is regarded as a 'vomit' from its parents. If a parent sleeps with his own child, 'he is eating his own vomit.' See also Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1997, p. 142.

Chapter 2: Traditional Rituals of the Ngonde

This chapter aims at discussing selected rituals of the Ngonde both religious and non-religious. Since African Traditional Religion permeates all of life, in the final analysis these rituals will turn out to be religious. It has been said that African Traditional Religion "is characteristically ritualistic and utilitarian."¹ Such a discussion is necessary to understand the interaction of Ngonde Christians with African Traditional Religion.

Traditional Rituals

Every society, whether traditional or otherwise, engages in rituals which give it identity and cohesiveness. The rituals occupy an important place in the lives of those who perform the rituals or on whose behalf the rituals are performed. Before going into a detailed discussion of traditional rituals of the Ngonde, it is of essence to discuss the various definitions of ritual and the role it plays in society.

A ritual is defined as a patterned behaviour, often communal, consisting of prescribed actions performed periodically and/or repetitively. Rituals act as a form of communication, promote solidarity and provide confidence in the face of danger. A rite is a specific ritual action or practice, including physical movements and any accompanying words.² One characteristic of a ritual is that it is composed of a series of symbolic activities, distinct from the social routines of everyday life, and members recognize it as a ritual. A ritual is normally connected to a specific set of ideas that are mythological. "What gives rituals their power is that participants assert that the authorization for the ritual comes from outside themselves—from the state, society, God, the ancestors or 'tradition.'"³ There are many types of rituals and not all are religious. Anthropologists normally use the term ritual to identify certain repetitive social practices, many of which have nothing to do with religion. However, it is noteworthy that religious rituals are set off from other rituals because

¹ O. Imasogie, *African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: University Press, 1982, p. 76.

² John R. Hinnells (ed), *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984.

³ Robert H. Lavenda and Emily A. Schultz, *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003, pp. 72-73.

Most religious traditions have developed specialized social routines for communication with the gods that, if performed correctly, should ensure successful communication. As a consequence, religious rituals are distinctive in that they regularly involve attempts to influence or gain the sympathy of a particular personified cosmic being. The kind of religious ritual involves addressing these personified forces in human speech, often out loud, while holding the body in a conventional posture of respect; this is called prayer. Another kind of religious ritual involves offering something of value (goods, services, money, or an appropriately slaughtered animal) to the invisible forces or their agents; this is called sacrifice. Prayer and sacrifice frequently are performed when members of a religious tradition come together in processions, meetings, or convocations; this is called congregation.⁴

The ritual leaders in religious rituals are normally the priests who act as mediators and work for the benefit of the group or individuals within the group. These are people who are skilled in the practice of religious rituals and they ensure that the required rituals are properly performed in order for communication with the deity to be successful. In some societies, chiefs carry out the mediatory role and not the priest. In such societies, the chiefs act as priests as well.

Other rituals, which may not be considered religious by those coming from outside of Africa, are those that have to do with rites of passage. Rites of passage occur when one or more members of a society are ritually transformed from one kind of social person into another, and this is considered as a kind of promotion on the part of those whose status is changing. The rites of passage include birth rites, puberty rites, marriage rites, and funeral rites.⁵ In some cases, these life-cycle transitions and rituals are performed to connect participants to the ancestors and therefore do contain some religious overtones.

Aylward Shorter has described a 'religious ritual' as an appeal to spiritual beings that have the power to influence events, undertaken with the intention that they take control of events. He categorizes them into three groups: rituals of redress, rituals of life-crisis or initiation and rituals of

⁴ Ibid. pp. 73-74.

⁵ Arnold van Gennep, an anthropologist, originated the concept of the rites of passage, which are transitional stages in the life of a human being. He believes that these rites of passage are in all cultures, marked by ceremonies which may differ in detail but are universal in function. See Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

liminality.⁶ He singles out the ancestral rituals as pertaining to the category of redress, even though they go further than that. They "repair" the wrongs that have been committed that call for punishment (and give people relief), but they are also used to maintain the peace that an individual or a society may be enjoying. Both types of rituals of redress are important in that they are both intended to maintain the bonds of communion between the living and their ancestors and the balance of the universe.⁷ For an African, a "ritual is the powerful mechanism for keeping in touch with one's own spirit and spirit world."⁸

Traditional Rituals Associated with the Rains

Godfrey Wilson notes that in the past, the Ngonde used to perform two notable agricultural rituals associated with the rains, namely, *ukuyola ikikungu*, which had to be practiced every year, after the break of the rains, and another unnamed ritual which was carried out later in the year when the first maize and the first pumpkin leaves were ready to be eaten, which can rightly be called a first-fruit ceremony. John Mbiti emphasizes the agricultural context of many of the African rituals.

The seasons control the rhythm of life, and in many [African] societies the change of the seasons is marked or observed with ritual activities. There are rites to mark many occasions like the start of the rain, the planting ceremony, the first fruits, the harvest of the crops and the beginning of the hunting season. These communal rites and activities are extremely important in strengthening community consciousness and solidarity, and are educational occasions for the young people concerning both social and spiritual matters.⁹

Ukuyola ikikungu was the practice of clearing out the ashes, a kind of purification of the land. This would normally take place at the beginning of a new farming year. This was a communal ritual and everyone participated in it.¹⁰ It was believed that the sprits of the ancestors, whether of chiefs or

⁶ Aylward Shorter, *African Culture and the Christian Church: An Introduction to Social and Pastoral Anthropology*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974, p. 126.

⁷ Ibid. p. 123.

⁸ Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ceremonies*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002, pp. 8, 14.

⁹ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, p. 234.

¹⁰ There were some rituals which involved sacrifices to the heroes and the shades (*basyuka*) of the chiefs which were holy and private; only a handful of priests and

of ordinary people, were closely associated with the fires in the houses of their descendants; and so it was only by clearing out the old fires annually that the sprits and their potential anger could be driven away. The spirits would come and warm themselves by the fires and this was regarded as unhealthy by the Ngonde. While the ancestors were venerated, continued communion with their spirits was not welcome because evil would result. The Ngonde believed that the spirits of the dead constantly came to "brood" on man and his works and had constantly to be satisfied and driven away by ritual.¹¹ Monica Wilson expresses it thus:

The purpose of 'throwing out the ashes' in all the homesteads is essentially the same. The shades 'come to warm themselves' at the hearths of their descendants, they 'bring sickness to the hearths' and so the old ashes are cleared out and new fire is lighted. The phrase *ukuyola ikikungu* is used in Ngonde for clearing out the litter (*ulifumbo*) after a burial, or an initiation ritual, and for shaving after a ritual, as well as for clearing the ashes from all the hearths in the country. It is also thought that domestic fires are contaminated by witches who may have cooked the human flesh they steal over their victims' own fires.¹²

The Ngonde had to chase the spirits away so that they could hoe in peace. *Ukuyola ikikungu* could also take place if there were many sicknesses in the land, or plague, or prophecies of evil to come. For instance, the ritual was carried out in July 1937 to cleanse the country after a plague of rats.¹³ Sacrifice commonly preceded or followed the cleansing ceremony and it formed an integral part of the cleansing ritual. Owen Kalinga notes that even without the occurrence of epidemics, all the residents of the kingdom met at Kyimbwe once a year to renew their allegiance to the Kyungu, the divine king of the Ngonde. Again, all fires were extinguished just before the ceremony and new fires were provided from the royal fire which was always kept burning at Mbande and which symbolized the omnipotence of the Kyungu.¹⁴

chiefs entered the groves and the details of the rituals were not discussed with other people.

¹¹ Godfrey Wilson, *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Manchester University Press, 1939, p. 32.

¹² Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 102-103.

¹³ Ibid. p. 102.

¹⁴ Owen Kalinga, *A History of the Ngonde Kingdom of Malawi*, Berlin: Mouton, 1985, p. 65.

In the past, a ritual centre was established at Kyimbwe, just two miles north of Mbande, and prayers were said at the beginning of the rainy season, just before harvest and whenever droughts occurred. One of the Kyungu's officials, Mulwa, became the custodian of the centre, and although the Kyungu did not attend the rituals in person, he blessed Mulwa before the latter went to conduct the rituals. If, for example, people complained of a prolonged epidemic and Mulwa sensed feelings of uneasiness in the kingdom, it was his duty to take up the matter with the Kyungu and, on a chosen day, all fires in the land were extinguished and the ashes thrown towards Kyimbwe. The *Makambala* (nobles), all the village headmen and all the ordinary men and women went to Kyimbwe where they threw away the ashes of the whole land. At the same time they threw away pots and baskets in which food was served. The people who could not get to Kyimbwe threw them away from their own houses on the same day as the others. In addition to throwing the ashes, a sacrifice was made in one of the sacred groves of the Kyungus and all the fires were put out. At Kyimbwe new fire was made with a fire drill by the nobles of Ngonde. New fire was distributed to the whole plain in proper order. Great chiefs and senior nobles took it first and passed it to their juniors, chiefs passed it to village headmen and in each group the common people got it from their own ruling nobles or their own village headmen. People danced on their way home saying "Let us dance, let us fight that the homesteads may be peaceful. Let us throw out the ashes that death may leave the homesteads and they be at peace."¹⁵

The second agricultural ritual was performed later in the year when the first maize and the first pumpkin leaves were ready to be eaten. The first-fruit ritual was a seasonal ritual which solicited the blessings of the Kyungu and the ancestral spirits before the Ngonde could eat their crops. It is believed that the ancestral spirits had to be appeased before any of these activities could successfully take place. Seasonal ceremonies not only helped to ensure man's survival in the face of natural adversity but also to express his joy in the successful passing of each phase of the year.¹⁶ The first-fruits

¹⁵ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 104.

¹⁶ Richard Gadama reports of a similar ritual among the Sukwa. Prayers are held before picking the first pumpkin leaves. Richard Gadama, *Women's Leadership and Rainmaking Shrines among the Sukwa in Northern Malawi*, MA Module, Mzuzu University, 2010; Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ceremonies*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002, p. 236.

were offered by the nobles of Ngonde in the grove of the previous Kyungu, the one who had died last. Following this, each family would offer first-fruits to their own ancestral spirits. And finally they would eat among themselves, each man with his wife. But before the sacrifices they would not eat for fear of angering the spirits. The ceremonies were led by the religious practitioners who were the descendants of the divine king, the Kyungu of Ngonde who performed the ritual for the well-being of the whole Ngonde land.

Both rituals are no longer practiced these days; they have died away. However, another ritual, *ukutagha ikikungu* came onto the scene to replace the *ukuyola ikikungu* ritual but it is no longer an annual event. *Ukutagha ikikungu* is performed when there is a threat of drought, to ward off epidemic diseases or other calamities.

Beliefs about the Causes of Drought

While belief in the withholding of rain is present in many African societies, it differs in terms of who is thought to have the power to withhold it. For example in some parts of Malawi news about people tying the rain does crop up occasionally, especially when there is a dry spell. Among the Chewa, apart from other causes, it is believed that witches can cause droughts by using bad magic.¹⁷ Time and again the media reports about people who have been beaten to death for withholding rain because they had activities such as building houses, making sun dried bricks or had houses which needed roofing or anything that does not need rains. At times a witch can do it just to punish people for insulting him or to have some of his demands met.

Among the Ngonde, it is very rare to have a finger pointed at any one as being responsible for withholding the rain. It is only the royal family who are believed to be custodians of the rainmaking instrument *mulima* who could be responsible for withholding it. Mpeta Mwakasungula (head of the Kyungu family) is the one who is currently believed to possess drought (*chilangalanga*).¹⁸ Formerly, when there was a dry spell, people's attention

¹⁷ James Amanze, *African Traditional Religion in Malawi: The Case of the Bimbi Cult*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2002, p. 72. Bad magic is used to bring harm while good magic brings good results such as protection, high production in the field; the borderline is not always clear.

¹⁸ Binnie Mwakasungula, *Rainmaking among the Ngonde of Karonga in Northern Malawi*, BA, University of Malawi, 1999, p. 9.

would focus on the Kyungu and to what people might have done to anger him or any members of his family. Among the Ngonde chief Kyungu has been and is always associated with the rains; either providing them or withholding them. In fact, one of the missionaries is quoted as saying that "one Kyungu was deposed because he could not give rain in a time of drought."¹⁹ In addition, the Kyungu was not expected to wade across a river because such an act could magically bring a downpour of rain from heaven. He had always to be carried if he needed to travel.²⁰ The Kyungu was believed to have power to withhold or to allow the rains to fall. Lack of rain was interpreted to mean that one of the Kyungus, either dead or living, was angry. Occasionally if one of the chiefs had recently insulted the Kyungu, the people concluded that it was the living Kyungu who was angry. The wrongdoer would take a cow to the Kyungu, who would then address the nobles of Ngonde, saying: "If it was my anger which brought the drought then it will rain for I am no longer angry. But if the rain does not come then it could not have been my anger, it must have been one of the dead Kyungus whom you forgot to ask about."²¹ Additionally, the living Kyungu's power of causing a drought was believed to arise both from his relationship to the spirits and from his possession and use of *Mulima*.

There is a long standing history of chief Kyungu, either living or dead, and the members of the royal family and his association with the rains. Godfrey Wilson records a drought story which occurred in the 1930s which was thought to have resulted from the anger of Chief Kyungu's son, Mpeta Mwakasungula, who was sent into exile due to the disagreements he had with his cousin chiefs from his matrilineal lineage. While he was in exile, there was drought in Ngondeland. Following the drought, men went to Kyungu and "asked what they had done to deserve a drought." The chief denied that it was not he who had caused it but suggested that perhaps the exile of his son Mwakasungula might have caused it due to his anger following the exile. The chiefs and some men then went to Mwakasungula in exile and pleaded with him to come back because people were dying of drought. He agreed to come back home, and while he was on the way coming, there was a heavy downpour of rain. When people saw this, they concluded that it was indeed Mwakasungula's anger that had caused the

¹⁹ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 21.

²⁰ Godfrey Wilson: *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Manchester University Press, 1939, p. 36.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 31.

drought.²² Drought was regarded as a punishment for sin of humanity against either the living or the dead Kyungu (and his family members) who needed to be appeased. At times, diviners had to be consulted to inquire who it was that was angry since either the dead or the living Kyungu's anger could cause drought. There were occasions when the rainmakers, who were delegated by the Kyungu to take care of *mulima*, could use the power to punish people for the wrongs that they had done to them. Monica Wilson recounts a story of Kasitile a rainmaker who withheld rain because he was angry that his son was taken as a tax defaulter to work on the roads.²³ Again Mackenzie records an incident about a dry spell, which occurred in 1912. Mwandosya, a custodian of *mulima*, refused to make rain because there was a disagreement between him and Kasikula over the sharing of cattle. Kasikula took the lion's share and this displeased Mwandosya. Kasikula reluctantly agreed to give Mwandosya some more cattle and it was after that agreement that torrents of rains followed.²⁴ Today, though the Kyungu is associated with rainmaking, there is strong belief that the water that comes from rain is a gift from God. There are some elders who believe that the lack of rain occurs because people have neglected the cultural traditions and have embraced the Western ones instead.²⁵ To them, drought is not natural but a sign that God is displeased with the Ngonde, a view that is widely held by many.

The one who makes the rain is known as *mpela fula*, literally meaning 'creator of rain', and is delegated by the Kyungu to make rain. Formerly, rainmakers were men who used perforated instruments called 'rain,' to produce rain or sunshine. The heroes were believed to create rain by the virtue of their bodies, but the Kyungu also had a treasured instrument of iron, perforated like a mouth organ, and several chiefs had perforated stones which were used to make rain. Such stones were known as *mulima*.²⁶ The holes were the eyes. If they were empty it would be empty in

²² Ibid. p. 26.

²³ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 116.

²⁴ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 211.

²⁵ Int. Lotison Mwakanema, Village Headman, Mwambuli Village 19.7.2011.

²⁶ Binnie Mwakasungula's father Mpeta was once Chief Kyungu and was actively involved in the rainmaking ceremony. Binne asked his father about the whereabouts of the *Mulima* stone but his father wouldn't reveal where it was and who the custodian was. See his work on "Rainmaking among the Ngonde of Karonga in Northern Malawi," BA, University of Malawi, 1999. During my field research in 2010 I was told that the stone is no longer used these days. It is possible

the sky above also, there would be no clouds; if some were full then there would be a few clouds, if all were full then there would be many clouds and rain. The instrument would normally be placed in water and as long as it stayed submerged in water, rain continued to fall and once removed rain would stop. Mwakanandi describes the *mulima* and how it was used

Rainmaker was Tom Mwakabanga – a Ngonde from Karonga, known from the 1920s to the early 50s. He possessed a secret object called *mulima* which he used in rainmaking. It was about the size of a man's fist, with eyes, the size of a red bean, all over it. When eyes opened it rained, when they closed it was withheld. If the guardian had a quarrel with people he would keep it closed and consequently rain would not fall. Thus the people were careful not to quarrel with or offend Mwakabanga.²⁷

In most cases the care of the stone was delegated to a junior kinsman or even a slave, but often the office became hereditary and rainmakers were men of substantial power.²⁸ "His function appeared to be that of 'a conductor' through whose person, or acts, or abstinence from action, the continuance of the rain granted at prayer of the chief is assured."²⁹ What this means is that the rain-maker was a representative figure of the entire community to fulfill specific assigned duties and prohibitions if the chief's prayers were to be heard. The rainmakers were subject to certain taboos. During the dry season they were not supposed to wash for fear that they may drive away the rain. In addition, they were not expected to shave because the hair was compared to black clouds which bring rain. A bald head signified sunshine, and by extension, drought. And the rain maker was not expected to eat roasted maize for as the maize crackles in the pot-sherd when it is roasted, so the thunder will crackle in the sky. Eating green maize was a taboo to the rain-maker, especially if the maize was picked during the rains. He would wait until the dry weather began because it was believed that he creates rain that means he creates all the food that grows with the rain. If he began eating too soon he might stop the growth. Additionally, when the rainmaker was manipulating his instruments he had to observe a

that it is being used but it must be kept secret. The leaders were more comfortable to talk about the prayers and than about the *Mulima* stone.

²⁷ Dolb Simion Mwakanandi, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*, PhD, University of Stellenbosch, December, 1990, p. 41.

²⁸ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 116.

²⁹ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 210.

sex taboo. "When I am making rain," said Kasitile, "I do not sleep with my wives for two days, it's a taboo. How would Kyala help us if I did?"³⁰ He was supposed not to be angry during the rains for fear of bringing on a lightning storm with fatal effect to someone. In June he may begin cautiously to wash himself and he may indulge in the luxury of a full bath and at the same time he may trim, but not completely shave his hair. Tradition has it that when the rain maker broke any of the set rules he was put to death to please the ancestors of the society.³¹ In theory the rainmaker always worked under the direction of the political authority—the Kyungu or a chief—but he was also thought to inflict vengeance on those who angered him.

Rain-Making and Rain-Calling

The Ngonde normally turn to the power of spirits to seek rain in order to chase drought away. It needs to be mentioned here that the practice of turning to the spirits is commonly held by Malawians and Africans at large. For instance, in Senga Bay, Salima, villagers still believe in the power of spirits and rainmakers to open up the skies and to chase drought away.³² Just like it happens in many African societies, the Ngonde also have their own ways of appealing to the divine when rains seem to delay or completely fail. Rainmaking or rain-calling³³ is highly placed in African societies because it is a ceremony which is concerned with human life, and animal life and all the environment surrounding man.

Rain is the symbol of life itself and the epitome of well-being for people, animals and plants. Rain is for the life of man what health is for the individual. Without sufficient rain the people suffer agony and may ultimately starve.³⁴

³⁰ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 116.

³¹ Binnie Mwakasungula, *Rainmaking among the Ngonde in Northern Malawi*, BA, University of Malawi, 1999, p. 3.

³² Emmanuel Muwamba, Staff Reporter, "Turning to Power of Spirits to Seek Rain," in *The Nation*, Vol. 18, no. 75 of 15th April, 2011, p. 19.

³³ For a thorough discussion on rain-calling among the Ngonde see Stephen Msowoya, *Rain-calling in Chief Kyungu's Area of Central Karonga*, Seminar Paper, Chancellor College, Zomba, 1986.

³⁴ John Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion*, London: SPCK, 1975, p. 109. Most Chewa names for God imply that he is the giver of rain.

Rainmaking is normally accompanied by rituals and other ceremonies and it is a community affair; needless to mention that the rituals associated with the rains are religious. "Rain is a deeply religious rhythm, and those who 'deal' in it, transact business of the highest religious calibre."³⁵ The notable ritual that is performed among the Ngonde is called *ukutaga ikikungu* or purification, but today, this ritual is commonly known as *chikungu*. This ritual is similar to *ukuyola ikikungu* and purification is a common element in both rituals. The only difference is that *ukuyola ikikungu* was an annual event while *ukutaga ikikungu* is performed when need arises.³⁶ The Sukwa of Chitipa have a similar rainmaking ritual which is performed during periods of drought and it is known as *ukutagha ichikungu*.³⁷

Today, even though droughts are infrequent, the Ngonde offer prayers and sacrifices when there is a threat of drought, the latest being at the beginning of the 2007/2008 rainy season. The prayers and sacrifices accompany the rainmaking ceremony. Ephron Mwambungu is the ritual leader; he officiates at sacrifices, offerings and ceremonies relating to rain-calling³⁸ that take place at three ritual centres namely, Lulindo, Chisindile/Chizindile, originally known by the name Kisindile and Malungo. Apart from that, he is also regarded as "*tata*" (father/elder of the village) and is involved in some social activities of the Ngonde.³⁹ When there is a dry spell, elders sit down and invite Mpeta Mwakasungula⁴⁰ to decide on the way

³⁵ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, p. 237.

³⁶ Refer to the discussion above. *Ukuyola ikikungu* literally means throwing out the rubbish, especially the ashes from the fireplaces. This ritual took place at the break of the rains.

³⁷ Richard Gadama, Women's Leadership at Rainmaking Shrines among the Sukwa in Northern Malawi, MA Module, Mzuzu University, 2010.

³⁸ I use the term rain-calling because this is a ritual that accompanies the rainmaking process. Rainmaking is a private affair which is not mentioned at all, but I strongly believe that these two rituals go together. The rains that begin immediately after the prayers on the final day show that the rains are a result of manipulation of the rain instrument.

³⁹ Some of the activities include installation of new village heads. He takes them into seclusion and brings them out when they are ready for installation. When they quarrel, he settles their disputes, and if he cannot handle their cases he refers them to T/A Karonga.

⁴⁰ Mpeta Mwakasungula, which comprises seven households, is the clan from which the Kyungus are chosen whenever there is a vacancy. Mpeta Mwakasungula

forward. It is believed that the only person who can hold the rains is Mpeta Mwakasungula as he is the one who possesses drought (*chilangalanga*), and by extension *mulima*. Mwambungu's work is similar to that of Mpeta Mwakasungula in similar an event, who goes to the graves of Mwakabanga to offer prayers and sacrifices. It must be pointed out that the decision to offer prayers and sacrifices does not originate with chief Kyungu himself. It comes from the people who approach the Kyungu through the subordinate chiefs, and he gives approval that the necessary rituals be performed.

Prayer and sacrificial rituals for rains are performed in three phases which are done on three consecutive days. On the first day, they go to the grave of the first Chief Kanyighe at Lulindo and they build *chitembe cha musyombe* (a temporary shelter made from bamboos). This shelter is an equivalent of a shrine where sacrifices are offered and prayers made. Then they pray and sweep in the shelter. They carry a little beer (*chipumu*), a white hen, white cloth, two clay pots and *sisya* which are placed in the clay pots. Prayers for rain have to be accompanied by sacrifices. Offering of sacrifices is a meritorious act which allows the deities to consider granting favours.⁴¹ An example of the prayer they offer at Lulindo goes like this:⁴²

Kyala, tutula twe bana bako
Kanyighe, tata wawene Karonga

God, help us your children
Kanyighe, father of the inhabitants of
Karonga

Tupilika, ifula yatamya
Twapera tupepo misi

Hear us, rain is a problem
Please give us water

On the second day, they buy a winnowing basket, four plates, a white hen (but a cock is also acceptable), seeds of different kinds, a white cloth, four clay pots and *chimera* (malt). They carry these things to Chisindile, a sacred forest where prayers are held. Ordinary people are not allowed into the forest, and bush fires must be avoided at all cost. One villager said that even if people were to be allowed to enter into the forest they would be afraid to go there because it is frightening. Mwambungu goes with one of his *lisoka* (councillor) and TA Karonga's noble man (*likambala*), two elders of the village and one woman (a total of five people). When they get to Chisindile, they do not enter into the forest unless they are sure that everyone who is supposed to come has arrived. They have to enter together because the place is quite fearsome *kusisya fiyo*, so they need to

is the head of all the households because he comes from the first house (first born son - Mwakabanga). He is the custodian of *mulima*.

⁴¹ O. Imasogie, *African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan University Press, 1982, p. 76.

⁴² Int. Ephron Mwambungu, ritual leader, Mwanyesha Village, 5.3.2011.

wait for one another. It is believed that Mwenekisindile is a big snake called *nyifwira*, which resides in Chisindile forest. Of course Mwambungu on the one hand admitted that he had never seen the snake though he goes there to lead prayers to it, but he believes it is there. Mwakalenga on the other hand claimed to have seen the snake once when he was young.⁴³ In the past, there used to be a pool of water where Chisindile used to reside but it dried up with passage of time.

There are other animals in the forest but they do not prey on the chickens. The snake can sometimes become angry especially when people offend it by taking one of the chickens from the forest that were brought there during previous visits. Tradition has it that when the snake is angry, it goes to Filagule forest in Mpata. It is believed that Filagule is male while Chisindile is female. Stormy rain is a sign that the snake is angry. When they enter the forest, they offer a prayer as a way of saying "*Hodi!*"⁴⁴ so that the spirits can be alerted that some visitors are entering the forest. While there, they offer the same prayer as above, but this time they mention Mwenekisindile who is believed to stay in the forest. Mwambungu leads the prayer.

Mwenekisindile, tadagha njala
 Tupepo misi
 Tutula twebana bako twisile
 Tukutwalire a ka chakulya
 Kuti ututule uswe
 Kumwanya kumile
 Ikisu kyumile
 Tukulonda misi amatalale

Mwenekisindile, we are hungry
 Give us water
 Help us your children we have come
 We have brought you food
 So that you help us
 Heaven is dry
 The land is dry
 We want cold water

When they enter into the forest, they come to a big tree where they place whatever they have brought for Mwenekisindile. The white cloth is tied on both ends to the tree and acts like a curtain, the white colour representing purity. They then offer prayer, beginning with his first councilor in that order, and then he prays last. The prayers are offered while they are kneeling down. After the prayers, they leave everything there; the live chicken, and all the foodstuffs. The chicken just walks about in the forest, joining the chickens that were thrown there before. No one is allowed to take the chickens out of the forest, and if he does, Chisindile follows to get them back. Mwambungu pointed out that no sexual relations are allowed a night before or on the day they go to Kisindile especially for the five who go

⁴³ Int. Stowell Mwakalenga, Kafikisila Village, 5.3.2011. He is a village headman and is 69 years old. His house is very close to Chisindile forest.

⁴⁴ It means "knock, knock."

to offer prayers. The woman who accompanies the men to Kisindile is chosen "*mu mphepo syabo*" (in the spirit),⁴⁵ and the current one is Nafulirwa. The woman must be elderly, having reached menopause to maintain the purity of the ceremony.⁴⁶ The main role that the woman plays is that of ululating during the prayer sessions. Some villagers allege that those who go to offer prayers and sacrifices at Chisindile do that while naked, an allegation denied by Mwambungu. Perhaps people speculate this because there is a lot of secrecy surrounding the prayers. For instance, those who go there do so secretly; it is not announced publicly. Perhaps they do not want to draw the attention of the crowds which may disturb the solemnity of the ceremony. The prayer leader does not have special clothing; he just wears his ordinary clothes.

On the third day, which is the final day, the masses from Mwakasungula and Mwanyesha villages gather for the Chikungu ritual (*ukutagha ikikungu*). *Makambala* go round making announcements to let people know that the ritual will take place the next day. Everyone is encouraged to go and those who stay at home have a case to answer, and again, where will they get the fire from? Only small children or the elderly are left out for various reasons. Those who stay at home must not do any work, be it farming or any household chores. They must just sit and wear a somber face. People come with drums known as *ndingala* and they beat them continuously. Mwambungu leads the delegation with a flywhisk in his hand, followed by *Makambala* while *ndingala* is beating on the way to Malungo, the ritual place. Malungo is in Group Village Headman Zindi's village. Malungo is located on Kaporo road after Rukuru River. Mwambungu noted that young children who may join the large group are not allowed near the place where the Chikungu ritual is carried out. This is done to avoid disturbances because children may not take the ceremony seriously as it is always a very solemn occasion. Everyone who wishes to go is allowed, but *mafumu* are the ones who play a leading role in the ritual.⁴⁷ It must be borne in mind that rainmaking is a religious ceremony and certain rules need to be observed. For example, no sexual acts are allowed the night before the

⁴⁵ The informant did not elaborate how the selection is done, but the term suggests that it is done in a mystical way.

⁴⁶ At the shrine, it was believed, menstrual blood could chase away the presence of God. Isabel Apawo Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Int. Kafuwa Mughogho, Mwambuli Village, 3.5.2011.

ritual day, no fights or quarrels for the spirits would be angry and therefore not listen to the prayers that accompany the rainmaking ceremony.⁴⁸ All fires must be extinguished, all fire places smeared, no one is allowed to bathe and each family has to carry either an old plate or an old pot to the meeting place of the ritual. It was emphasized that this was an important requirement if the ceremony was to be effective.

The ritual leaders carry a big winnowing basket with them with a hole in it. After prayers, they tie the basket to two reeds that are dug into the ground. Ephron Mwambungu could not explain the significance of this activity, but it could be that the hole represented that of *mulima* which had holes.⁴⁹ People are encouraged to carry different things from their homes, ashes, old plates, cups, pots or whatever to throw at the ritual place. The old things must be thrown away so that evil and diseases should be chased from the villages.⁵⁰ In this process, diseases are normally represented by *vikhoso* (coughs). All defiled things like ashes, pots, plates should be removed as part of the *Chikungu* ritual. If the seeds were planted and the rains stopped before they mature, the withered/dry crops are uprooted and taken to be thrown together with the old pots and plates as sacrifice. The withered crops are also taken for God to see so that he can have mercy on them. The *Chikungu* ritual is also carried out when plants are attacked by aphids. Each of the plants attacked is taken and placed in one place. People throw the things while the leader speaks these words

Fya siguluke	Let the misfortunes fly away
Umo mubapelile ifula a bakale	As you gave those of old the rains
Mutupepo ifula	Give us rain also
Tutonyekesya amisi gwe Kyala	Give us a drop of water o God
Tupelera chisa	Have mercy on us.
Tuhobokere twe bana bako	Forgive us your children
Tupyelekesya kugwa mmabingu	Intercede for us to the one who resides in the clouds
Ukuti atupepo ifula	That he may give us rain

When praying the leader mentions the four corners of the world, Filagule, Kilimanjaro, and other places. Kyala is mentioned first, and then the other names of God follow: Mwalankusa, Mwikemo, Tenende, Ndolombwike, etc. After prayers comes the time for them to make fire.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, abstinence from sex, no bath, no quarrels are rules that the rainmaker observes.

⁴⁹ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 114.

⁵⁰ Int. Ephron Mwambungu, Mwanyesha Village, 5.3.2011.

Fire-Making Ceremony

The fire-making ceremony is a brief but important part of rain-calling. Two noble men, one from Mwanyesha and another from Karonga, do the job of making fire. They sit on the ground facing each other. A piece of dry flat wood is placed in the middle and a small dry stick (twig) is placed on top of this dry piece of wood. One starts the process of causing friction on the dry flat wood. It is a fast process and within a short time smoke comes out. As the smoke comes out people jubilate as this is the symbol of clouds forming in the sky. Sparks of fire that are produced in the process represent the lightening that accompanies the rains, and then fire breaks out. When the fire breaks out there is always great celebration because it is a sign that God has accepted their sacrifices and has heard their prayers. It is believed that fire takes long to break out when God does not accept the sacrifice. Everyone then has to carry the fire *kuchikoka chamukambalala* (something made by weaving leaves from a palm tree). This follows the fact that people are not allowed to make fire in their homes on the day of the ritual. In fact, the fire must be put out and the fire place must be smeared with mud. Those living in the area from Mwenilondo up to Malungo must put out their fires. At the markets they deploy watchmen to ensure that those who sell cooked food do not make fire but receive it from the ritual place. It can be argued therefore that fasting, though imposed on people, is part of the ritual because lack of fire means no eating. People normally come back from the ritual late in the afternoon. The fire made is new and therefore pure. According to the Ngonde, pure fire is required to destroy evil. They believe that the fire which was there has been contaminated with diseases and other evil, so they have to get new fire which is free from diseases because it plays an important role in life. Fire has to do with newness.⁵¹

Fire-making marks the end of the rain-calling ceremony and people go to their homes with great expectation that it will rain. It is believed that God answers their prayers because when they ask for rains, God grants them rains. Mwambungu claims that he has never gone to a ritual centre to offer sacrifices and prayers and return home without the ancestors answering

⁵¹ The idea of the fire representing newness can also be seen in the ritual of chieftainship among the Nyakyusa, especially that of "coming out." The making of fire by friction was the most important rite and all the old fires had to be put out throughout the chieftdom, and new fires put in place. This was a symbol of the ending of the old chieftainship and the establishment of the new. The new chief comes with new fire. Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 52-53.

their prayers either immediately or a day or two later. Some people of course find it an amazing thing that an individual can invoke God and request him to send down the rain and he obeys and rain starts falling. It is tempting to think that the rain is manipulated in some way, considering the fact that in most cases, the rain does not begin until people reach their homes. It appears that there is a very strong relationship between rainmaking ceremonies (by the custodian of *mulima*) and prayers and sacrifices that are offered for rains.

Mwambungu pointed out that prayers are offered not only when there is a problem of rains, but also when other disasters strike. There are times when *nchimi* go to Mwambungu to warn him that things are not all right in the village so that he organizes some prayers and they go to Chizindile. After prayers the calamities do disappear.⁵² The *Chikungu* ritual is also carried out when there are floods and an intervention of the deity is sought.

Malungu is not the only place where the rain-calling ritual takes place, as others do go to Filagule or Mbande, the headquarters of the Kyungu. Filagule is the name of a hill as well as the snake which inhabits the hill and is considered the owner of the hill. Elders, chiefs and people who are considered important go to Filagule when there are dry spells or illnesses. Elders are accompanied by young ones who are important in society, such as those who belong to the royal family, especially those who will be chiefs in future. These may go up to a certain place, but only a few *mafumu* go to the actual place called *Mwana* where they throw chickens, sheep and other things as sacrifice. Just like at Chisindile, the sacrifices are not to be taken away from the ritual centre by anybody. There is the story of a person who decided to take a chicken from Filagule and a big snake went straight to his house and camped there the whole night. When the man reported to the elders, he was asked to give a white hen and "*bakalumbirira*" (chant some words) and the snake disappeared with a heavy whirlwind. It was believed that it was Filagule himself who followed his chickens. Sometimes elders go to Filagule after one of them has been visited by the snake which demands that sacrifices be made to it.⁵³ Mbande Hill is also another place where people go when there is drought and other problems. It is believed that those who go to pray there go to the hill while naked⁵⁴ to "*kulumbirira*"⁵⁵

⁵² Int. Ephron Mwambungu (ritual leader), Mwanyesha Village, 5.3.2011.

⁵³ Int. Eliam Kasunga, Mwenitete Village, 28.3.2011.

⁵⁴ The issue of going for prayers while naked kept recurring, but those asked could not explain why. It is possible that instead of wearing sackcloth as it happened in

for rain to come. They mention names of ancestors such as Mwenemisuku, Filagule, Kilimanjaro⁵⁶ and others. They also mention the names of the major hills imploring them to help them. They kill a cow and leave it there. They throw all the seeds and whatever sacrifices they carry with them. Those who participate are told not to look back or come back after the prayers. It is believed that those who come back to take the meat are chased by spirits up to their homes. The Mwenemsano family is designated to pray on behalf of many during disasters. When the rains are a problem, people say *mwenemsano atughogha, tukamupepeshe* implying that they have done something wrong and the spirits need to be appeased. After prayers, rains and heavy winds are the result.⁵⁷ The ancestors are requested by people to intercede for them because it is believed that God hears the ancestors (especially chiefs) more easily than the living. The ancestors are not *figebenga* (rebels) like those who are living. The ancestors are good people. If there are some Kyungus who did not finish the term of ruling with honour and respect, then those praying will have to determine which names to mention and which ones to omit. Normally, those who are chosen as chiefs are good people so it is safe to expect that all of them are reliable as intercessors.⁵⁸

Rituals of Transition

Menstruation

In every society there is some recognition of puberty or the period of time when boys become men and girls become women as measured by the onset of their ability to produce. For the female, it is her first menstrual flow that signals that she is now a woman and that she is able to bear a child. In some cultures rigorous rituals accompany this phase of the girl's

the biblical times to show that people were sad, nakedness could convey the message that they were very desperate.

⁵⁵ *Kulumbirira* is an equivalent of praying. Informants do not use the word prayer to describe what people do when they go to the ritual centres. *Kulumbirira* means "uttering some words" to the deity.

⁵⁶ Kilimanjaro is mentioned because it is believed that there is a relationship between Kilimanjaro Mountain and the sacred hills of Filaule and others. In fact, the Ngonde view Kilimanjaro as the mother of the hills in the Ngonde area.

⁵⁷ Int. Akim Donald Kaisi, Village Headman, Mwembe Village, 20.11.2010.

⁵⁸ Int. Wilford Mwamatope, T.A. Karonga, Mwamatope Village, 20.11.2010.

life.⁵⁹ In other cultures this transition passes quietly. Among the Ngonde, when a girl sees her menarche, her first menstrual flow, she is expected to report to her paternal aunt or her grandmother about it, and not her biological mother. Then the aunt will teach the girl how to dress to keep the flow from spoiling her clothes (sanitary cloths), not to apply salt or bicarbonate soda to food when she is cooking, to respect her parents (especially her father) by not sitting close to them, not sleeping with boys otherwise she may become pregnant, etc. Cleanliness is also emphasized for the girl who is menstruating.⁶⁰ The girl is also told to treat sanitary materials with a lot of secrecy because these can be used to harm her by witchcraft.⁶¹ The cloths have to be hidden and men must not see them. Burning of the sanitary cloths is not allowed because it causes infertility. This is common not only to the Ngonde. Even among the Igbo women of Nigeria burning of cloths is a taboo because it "causes infertility because you are burning something from the womb and you are destroying it."⁶² Those who live close to fishing areas are told not to sit on a canoe or go round it, not to cross over fishing nets, otherwise the owners would not be able to catch more fish. Fishermen "normally" use medicines in order for them to have a huge catch, so it is believed that the menstrual flow 'neutralizes' the power of the medicines or the one who crosses them may be affected. Again during menstruation, the girl has to be careful not to go around houses because most people 'fortify' their houses with medicines, so she may be hurt through the magic that was used. The girl is instructed not to touch soaked millet (*chimera*) because she will cause it not to germinate. Further, she has not to cross the stream, if she does, her periods

⁵⁹ For example in Southern Malawi, girls are taken to a secluded place where they receive various kinds of teachings and skills, both theoretical and practical. Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, *Coming of Age: A Christianized Initiation among Women in Southern Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2005.

⁶⁰ Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler records that cleanliness of both the monthly period linen and the genitals is emphasized during *Chinamwali*, refer to songs 67 and 75 in her work, Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, *Coming of Age: A Christianized Initiation among Women in Southern Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2005, p. 38.

⁶¹ Rachel Fiedler reports a similar thing among the Chewa that menstrual blood should be handled with extra care to protect the girls from witchcraft and infertility. Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, *Coming of Age: A Christianized Initiation among Women in Southern Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2005, p. 26.

⁶² Umeora Ouj, "Menstruation in Rural Igbo Women of South East Nigeria: Attitudes, Beliefs and Practices," *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, vol 12, no. 1, April 2008.

will be heavy like a stream, etc. The girl is told that if she breaks these taboos her menstrual flow will never cease. This is the kind of instruction she receives. It can take place within thirty minutes.

The aunt who instructs the girl does not explain the reasons for not doing the specific behaviours that are taboo during the time of her menses. The aunt normally gives two general reasons to encourage avoiding these behaviours. The first is that the girl will not be able to have children. The second one is that she will have a continuous menstrual flow. After the instruction, the aunt then reports to the mother of the girl that she is now a grown up person. It appears that Ngonde boys do not have a specific period when they are advised of their becoming men, and not much is known, if at all, about what they are taught after seeing that they can produce semen. It appears that adults do not care what happens to boys but are very concerned about what happens to girls. One elder remarked, "Boys do not grow up,"⁶³ implying that there isn't any event to mark their transformation from boyhood to adulthood. Of course, production of semen signals that a boy is now becoming a man, but society does not ritually recognize that.

It must be noted though that in Ngondeland there are clans with varying rituals regarding menstruation based on the geographical origin of the clan. For example, there is a clan of the Chibesakunda who originated from Zambia and call themselves *ba Biza*, but live among the Ngonde in Kwiwula village.⁶⁴ They welcome the maturation of the girl in a different way. When a girl experiences her first flow, she is taken into seclusion in a house where she stays for seven days and is not allowed to cook for fear of contaminating the food with her unclean state. When she wants to take a bath, she must not use the normal bathroom but has to go to the bush and use an old clay pot for bathing for the seven days in seclusion.⁶⁵ She does not change clothes for seven days and at the end of seclusion she gives the clothes to her paternal grandmother. Even the mat that she uses to sit on is given to her grandmother. When the day comes for her to go out of the house, her brothers give her money (*kubongozga*) before she can talk to them. When

⁶³ Lotison Mwakanema, Mwambuli Village, 19.7.2011.

⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that most of the practices recorded here are similar to the ones that were formerly performed by the Nyakyusa, the Ngonde cousins. See Monica Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa*, London: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 132.

⁶⁵ This is similar to the instructions that are given to girls in Nkhotakota. For details see Esha Fikilini, *Umwali: Initiation among the Tonga in Kasitu in Nkhotakota*, BA, Mzuzu University, 2012.

coming out of the house, she has to cover herself with a cloth. Her sister-in-law or her aunt (a sister to her mother) is the one who takes her outside. But inside the house where she stays for seven days, she does not need to cover herself. On the day of coming out, the house has to be smeared to cleanse it. She is given money, soap, lotion as gifts, and wears new clothes. She is now a new person, her status has changed. All this is done in observance of the strong taboos that exist about the mystery of menstruation in African Traditional Religions.⁶⁶

For this clan, the repeat of the flow (*kusaula*) and the monthly continuation of menstruation is of paramount importance such that a girl is given food, especially *liseke* (meat or chicken), which contains traditional medication so that she can repeat the menstruation the following month. This is done because there are some girls who have no flow for many months, even up to seven, after experiencing the first menses. This may be cause for worry because menstruation is associated with childbearing and lack of it signifies lack of children. In the past, a girl was expected to marry soon after her first flow. The cause for the delay in the repeat of the monthly menstrual flow could be explained in many ways: the girl is applying salt to food, or is frying relish or roasting groundnuts. The thought is that if the girl does these things, the flow may disappear for some time.

When in marriage, this clan also takes great care for the woman not to have sex with her husband when in menses. She can share the bed with her husband but must face away from him. When she wants to go outside to relieve herself at night, the husband must open the door for her. When she disobeys the rules, the following things may happen to the husband: the man's testicles may become swollen (*majiankhonde*), he may lose his strength (*maka ghomalika*), or even his legs may become swollen and painful (*nkhomberwa*).

Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a highly valued status in African societies. The married woman treasures and anticipates pregnancy and the inability of a married woman to get pregnant is considered a curse. The Ngonde place high value on pregnancy because it is a sign that new life is being added to the society. The survival of a marriage is often dependent on whether or not the

⁶⁶ Cf. Isabel Apawo Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 32.

woman is fertile, even though there is a possibility that the man could be infertile. Pregnant women are expected to observe certain behaviours. For instance, they are advised not to sleep with other men or they will have problems in delivery. Difficult labour is interpreted as unfaithfulness on the part of the woman and at times the woman is asked to "confess her sins" and mention the men she had slept with besides her husband.⁶⁷ The pregnant woman should avoid having an elderly man pass behind her back, because some have fortified their bodies with medicine that may be harmful to her and the baby. The pregnant woman must be careful not to cross big rivers when she is in the first trimester of pregnancy because the pregnancy is not yet settled and miscarriage may result. The explanation is that different people cross the rivers and some of them have medicines in their bodies that are harmful. Pregnant women are also advised not to have sex from the eighth month until the baby is born. This is especially important for the first born because the sperm will be over the child's head, making it difficult to clean. In addition, they are advised not to eat meat from an animal that died without a known cause as this may lead to difficult labour or may result in the delivery of a dead child. A pregnant woman is also advised not to eat meat from a cow that dies while delivering a calf, for what has happened to the cow may also happen to her.

Though difficulties associated with pregnancy or barrenness are attributed to the breaking of taboos, in most cases they are also explained as being caused by witchcraft. There are beliefs that one can stop a woman from conceiving through witchcraft, *kupinya mphapo* (to tie the womb). In some cases, one may be going through a series of miscarriages, where witches are said to 'drink' the fetus. Or, sometimes, the pregnancy may disappear mysteriously or may be relocated to another place by the witch. My mother told me of a story of how her mother, my grandmother, suffered with my mother's pregnancy. My grandmother was pregnant and was bewitched by her sister-in-law and they got this information from an *nchimi* (diviner). The sister-in-law was jealous because my grandfather was a butcher and was

⁶⁷ Int. Witness Ng'ona, Kwiwula Village, 17.7.2011. This was also the practice among the Yao. Protracted labour was seen as the result of a certain sexual sin. It is remarkable that among the Yao, the husband was also interrogated and asked to confess if he was suspected to have committed adultery. See Robin Lamburn, "The Life of a Yao: The Traditional Rites," in Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity nd African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania 1900-1940*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 1999, pp. 178-213. Lamburn's text describes the situation in the 1930s in Southern Tanzania.

doing well financially and enjoying life with his wife. After nine months of pregnancy, the baby was not delivered; the witch had hidden the pregnancy at the back of the mother instead of being in its normal position in the uterus. The mother, my grandmother, began suffering and her husband decided to take her to a traditional healer. Grandfather carried her on his back on the way to the healer for days, some fifty kilometers away from his home. The *nchimi* told them that the witch wanted her to die with the pregnancy. Grandmother was treated and was told that she would give birth after another nine months, implying that the baby would stay in the mother's womb for 18 months. At the *nchimi*'s place, grandmother was made to pass through a small space in a tree through magic. Others received her on the other side of the tree. She was then given some medicine to take orally. Finally, she was discharged from the *nchimi* after a month. When she returned home, she gave birth to my mother after 14 months. My mother claims that she stayed in her mother's womb for 2 years and thus was given the name "Vinja" by her parents, which literally means "years." The couple returned to the *nchimi* after delivery for more rituals as advised. The *nchimi* gave my mother the name she answers to till to day. It is 'Queen Elizabeth' because it took her two years (*wakatchona*) to be born.

Apart from witchcraft, lack of children or miscarriage is also interpreted as anger of living parents or ancestral spirits. As discussed earlier, if one has been cursed by an aunt or parent, s/he may become infertile. The woman will conceive only when the anger of the ancestral spirits is appeased or after she has reconciled with the concerned parents. It is not uncommon for a childless family to visit a *nchimi* to enquire why they cannot have children and they are told to go and perform a ritual at the grave of a parent or grandparent because they were angry with them. Parents may become unhappy with their child and may complain bitterly about him and as a result, God may not bless him. For instance, one informant shared the story of a son who married a girl from another tribe without the approval of his father. The father reasoned with the son for a long time not to marry that woman, but the son insisted on marrying her. He therefore eloped with the girl and went to stay with her in another village without the knowledge of his parents. He stayed with the girl for three years but they had no children. They went to the hospital for examination and were told that both of them were capable of having children, they just needed to be patient. They then turned to traditional healers who gave them various kinds of medicine to no avail. One family advised them to see one of the diviners in the village, and they did. The diviner told the couple that the

man's parents were not happy with what the son had done and the only solution to their problem was for him to go back home and reconcile with them. After that, he and his wife should return to the diviner for a ritual and then they would have a son. Fear gripped them because they did not know how to approach them and how the parents would react because there had been no contact between them for the past three years. Subsequently, they asked for counsel from the diviner on how they should go about it. The diviner advised them to think of an elder in his father's village who could act as a mediator to take them to his father. Everything went perfectly well and the man got reconciled to his father. A simple ritual of chewing a piece of traditional medicine called *nyamphamba* and spitting it out was carried out. The father said "I was hurt with what you did, but I am no longer angry" and blessed both of them. The mother also said that she had no grudge against the son and loved both of them. The very same month the wife conceived.⁶⁸

Among the Ngonde, just like among many tribes of Malawi, pregnancy is something that is treated with secrecy. This can be attributed to the fear of witchcraft which is widespread among them. For example, a family cannot freely share the news that the wife has conceived, for it will be like advertising to the witches that they can come and 'drink' the fetus. People will be able to recognize that a woman is expecting a baby when her belly grows bigger. When this happens, they will refer to her as '*mundu mubine*' (somebody who is unwell). When she delivers a baby, people will talk about her as being 'well'. The word that is used actually means to 'get better' (*kupona*). It is common practice for a woman to tell one closest friend or neighbour when labour begins. Sometimes she may just sneak to the hospital without telling anyone. Sometimes one can meet her on her way to the hospital and ask her where she is going, she may lie that she is just taking a walk. Pregnant women are afraid that witches may take advantage of their condition to kill them or the baby through magic. Another reason for concealing a pregnancy has to do with sexual taboos, because it implies that one had sex. Tradition has it that a woman should stop having babies when her son gets married, for two reasons. First, she does not want to show that she is still having sex with her husband, and second, she will be required to take care of her daughter-in-law when her time to give birth comes. The mother would also be expected to assist her daughter-in-law during child birth and as such she must be cold, free from sexual activity. It must be noted though that this is no longer followed strictly.

⁶⁸ Int. Lucia Mwangofi, Simoni Village, 14.8.2010.

Birth Rituals

As humans fulfill their biological destiny, they pass through four major stages in the life cycle: birth; puberty or maturity; marriage or reproduction; and death. Every culture recognizes these major periods in some way, though some follow more colourful rituals than others do. Some cultures handle these experiences calmly and quietly; others exhibit much anxiety. Within each society, therefore, these rituals or rites of passage allow a member to properly and effectively move from one stage of life to the next.⁶⁹ Generally, from the moment of birth, an African is connected to the family, to the community, and to the ancestors. The arrival of a child is often seen as the reintroduction of the spirit of an honoured ancestor back into the world.⁷⁰ Among the Ngonde, birth rituals are not as dramatic as in many other cultures but they are respected and followed. As mentioned earlier in relation to female puberty, these rituals vary from one Ngonde area to another. There are some traditional practices that are done among some Ngonde clans that are viewed as exceptions by some and are not well known by other Ngonde. In addition, some of the rituals are fading away.

Chicken Presentation as Symbolic Communication

In the past in Mwembe village, when a baby was born, the husband was expected to carry a chicken to notify his wife's parents about the baby's birth.⁷¹ He carried a cock for a boy and a hen for a girl. This was done for the first and second born child. If the first born child was a girl and the second a girl again, he did not have to carry a chicken the second time he went to inform them, and the same was true if boys followed one another. For the rest of the children, he did not send the chickens. The sending of the cock and the hen had symbolic significance. Parents got the message well before one could speak, just by seeing the chicken. If it was a boy ululation could break out because male children were more valued than female ones. Then the wife's mother or her sister, if she had any, would come to the son-in-law's home to keep her (daughter) company and after some time, she would request that she takes her daughter so that she can stay with her parents for three to four months, "to chat with them." When

⁶⁹ Stephen Grunlan and Marvin Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, p. 78.

⁷⁰ Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, *African Ceremonies*, New York: Abrams, 2002, p. 14.

⁷¹ The Ngonde are a patrilineal society and the wife stays with the husband's family, away from her own family.

asked as to why this was done, the interviewee explained that the parents did that to allow the wound to heal, but he did not elaborate. It is possible that this was done to prevent the new mother and her husband from having sex for some time. In addition, the wife was not expected to cook for her husband for she was considered unclean, so her parents wanted to protect the husband. No cooking was allowed by the new mother to avoid "*kutupa*" (swelling) of those who may eat her food, an equivalent of *mdulo* of the Chewa.⁷² After sometime the wife's parents would bring her back together with the baby and there would be a big celebration. They would prepare a feast in a ceremony called *kuzapereka ufyere*. They would bring pots with different kinds of food, beer and mats. This is still happening in the remote areas, but only a few families still follow this tradition.⁷³

The 'Coming Out' of the Baby

When the baby is born, the mother and the child must be confined to avoid contact with others who may be dangerous to the baby, especially if they are sexually active. After seven days when the umbilical cord has dried and fallen off, the baby is washed in medicated water to protect it from diseases. This is a kind of traditional immunization (*katemera wachibulaki*) before it is taken out of the house. Until this time, the baby is kept indoors (*luvumbo*). The washing of the baby is normally done at the entrance to the house. In some clans the child is not taken outside the house, but instead, water is poured on top of a grass-thatched house so that it falls on the baby, who is placed in a winnowing basket. The women⁷⁴ participating in the ritual shout "*vula! vula! vula iyo!*" (here comes the rain!) which is symbolic of the rains that the child will meet as he/she goes out into the

⁷² For a detailed description of *mdulo* see J.W.M. van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2001, pp. 169-209. Also: Joe DeGabriele, "When Pills don't Work—African Illnesses, Misfortune and Mdulo," *Religion in Malawi*, 1999, pp. 9-28.

⁷³ Int. Akim Donald Kaisi, Mwembe Village, 20.11.2010. Today, it is common for women to cook after three weeks but she may not apply salt to any food. The interviewee could not explain why salt is special and not sugar. There are some people who strongly believe that the underlying reason was hygiene but in the past, the swelling apparently did take place. This was said to happen because people believed it.

⁷⁴ The women who carry out this exercise must be elderly, those who are not sexually active, for fear of *mioto*.

world. Rain represents a mixture of many things.⁷⁵ When the medicated water falls on the child, one of the women pulls the basket, dragging it outside the house.⁷⁶ Some of the medicine is placed in a cup and the child is made to drink it. After dragging the winnowing basket outside, if the child is male, they place a hoe and an axe in the child's hands (symbolically) and tell him that he should be cultivating. If the child is female, they give her a cooking stick (*mtinkho*) and a pestle signifying the type of work she will be expected to do outside.⁷⁷ Lelite Nyafulirwa emphasized that the washing of the baby is important to protect it from 'fires' (*mioto*). When the child goes out of the house many people will touch it and you never know the condition of those people, if they are "hot" or "cold."⁷⁸ Coldness describes someone who is not sexually active while hotness means being sexually active. If such people touch the baby, the baby may suffer from diseases that make her body swell. When a newborn baby dies, it is believed that she has been affected by fires. Either father or mother of the baby, or boys, girls, men or women of the village were involved in adultery. In one of the villages among the Ngonde, people around the house where the baby is born are made to wash their hands with herbs and they make the baby drink the dirty water to avoid *mioto*. In some cases the baby is thrown back and forth from one adult to another over the fire.⁷⁹ Finally, the baby's hair, and in some cases that of the mother, is shaved so that new hair can grow. Some shave the hair after a month.⁸⁰

Disposal of the Umbilical Cord

The umbilical cord that falls off after drying out must be properly disposed of or the mother will not be able to have another child. The side which is tied must face down as one disposes of it and it must be thrown into the pit latrine. If it is disposed upside down, the mother shall not be able to

⁷⁵ Some of the things include illnesses, hunger, jealousy, suffering, happy moments, etc.

⁷⁶ Int. Elizabeth Nyambowe, Mwamatope Village, 22.11.2010.

⁷⁷ Int. Lelite Nyafulirwa, Gwebe Village, 18.12.2010.

⁷⁸ For more discussion on the subject of coldness and hotness see J.W.M. van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2001 and Joseph DeGabriele, "When Pills don't work – African Illnesses, Misfortune and the *Mdulo*," *Religion in Malawi*, No. 9, 1999, pp. 9-23.

⁷⁹ Int. Twitike Mwabungulu, Katolola Village, 11.03.2011.

⁸⁰ Monica Wilson notes that shaving is both a purification and a sign of the completion of a ritual. *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 106.

conceive again. Formerly, in some areas of Ngondeland, the umbilical cord was normally buried at the new born baby's grandfather's home. If this was not done, the mother would not conceive again. Others could place it at the foot of a *mulama* or *musolo* tree. The right position was also maintained. Today, the process has been modified because most couples do not stay close to their parents and it is thus difficult to bury the umbilical cord at grandfather's home. The reason for throwing it in the pit latrine is to prevent anyone from picking it up and using it to make a charm that may cause harm to the child.⁸¹ Another common practice is to put protective charms around the child's neck and waist and wrist to ward off witchcraft attacks. This is done to ensure survival during the most fragile early years.

Naming of the Child

Naming of the child among the Ngonde does not require a big ceremony because the grandparents simply send the name if the couple is staying far from home. However, if grandparents are near by they name the child in person. Parents from the husband's side name the first born, while the second born gets its name from the maternal side. For the third born and onwards the children's parents are free to name. Ngonde is a patrilineal society; therefore, the husband's side gets the priority in naming the first born child. In other words, the one who paid the cows (the dowry) names the first child. There is a patriarchal element even in naming the child. In some areas, the parents name the first born after the father or the mother from husband's side, depending on the sex of the child. Sometimes the child can be named after an ancestor for remembrance.

For some, the naming of the child is considered as an important occasion, which is marked by some impressive ritual and celebration. For example, in some parts of Karonga such as Masoko village, the baby is named after seven days. On this day, the naked child is put in a winnowing basket. They shower some herbs like rain and it falls on the baby while they speak some words which are said to be wishing the baby all the best as it is coming out of the house and is being received into the world. This ritual is done in the presence of women only. Some believe that a newly born baby is not yet fully a member of society until it is named and as such should not be handled by men. Some choose to give names that are connected to one of the living-dead (ancestors) for remembrance. Others give their children Christian names that reflect attributes of God or their wish to praise God,

⁸¹ Int. Isaac Mwakanandi, Mwangomba Village, 20.11.2010.

for example Tuntufye, Bupi, and Wakisa.⁸² These names become lifelong testimonies of particular aspects of God. Other names remind people of their experiences in life surrounding the time the child was born. After the naming is done, people eat together and dance in celebration.

Traditional Contraception and Ways of Stopping Conception

There are many different traditional methods that women have used for contraception. These methods are still being practiced today because rural women do not trust the modern contraceptives. For the Ngonde women, tying a string around the waist is the most common method of contraception in order to practice child spacing. They tie a certain number of knots to represent the number of years one wants to stay without conceiving. If one wants to stay for four years, then she would tie four knots, etc. The string is made from a tree which has a medicinal element and it is called *nakabungu*. When one ties a string around her waist she has to be careful not to lose it. If it snaps while in the bush and it falls on top of grass she may not conceive until termites eat it and it decays.⁸³ Some women wear *mphighi* around the waist. They dig six small pieces of sticks from a medicinal tree called *mphighi* and make holes in them, and then put them on a string which they wear around the waist. After wearing the medicinal strings they continue to have sex with their husbands and rarely conceive. When a woman wants to conceive again she just snaps the waist string to be ready for another child.

If a woman wants to stop bearing children she has to take *denga*⁸⁴ that is unwashed (contains some blood from menstrual flow) and put it in a bottle which contains some traditional medicine and take it to an ant hill without covering it. She must dig a hole on the ant hill and put in the bottle upside down, and then she has to speak some words such as "I am through with you, *denga*." If the termites build their house and cover the bottle it means that she will never conceive again. After doing that she has to go straight home and must not look back. She enters her house and then comes out again and continues doing her household chores. At times, one may not be

⁸² Tuntufye means let us glorify God, Bupi – God is a giver, Wakisa – God is full of mercy. These are common names even today among Christians. Many people have both Christian and traditional names.

⁸³ Int. Elina Nakabundi, 14.7.2011.

⁸⁴ *Denga* is the name given to a piece of cloth that women wear when they are having their menstrual flow, especially in the villages. In towns and cities women sparingly use them. They either use cotton wool or what they call sanitary pads.

required to put the *denga* in the bottle, but may take it to the place where they throw their litter (*pachizala*) and then just cover it with some litter. Others put the *denga* in a tin and cover it and then bury it in the ground. All these methods are thought to be effective; of course some failures are experienced. Only women are expected to take the medicines or tie the strings around themselves, never men. Another type of traditional contraception involves taking medicine orally, and once taken a woman may not conceive again. Elderly women in the villages have a wide knowledge of these medicines, but some also get them from traditional healers.

Death and Burial Rituals

Death, including proper ways to mourn, preparation of the body and beliefs about the afterlife, calls for sacred rituals in most cultures. Among the Ngonde, like many other African societies, the funeral is a communal function where many people gather to mourn⁸⁵ and bury their loved one. This mourning may take up to one week, particularly if the deceased dies far from the home village. The funeral provides an opportunity for those who have not met for many years to return "home" because the dead are normally buried in the home village. Unlike in Western culture where, except for the immediate family, death does not bring ordinary activities to a standstill and where life for most mourners continues on a "business as usual" basis, life stops among the Ngonde so that people spend a number of nights at the grieving family's home. It is noteworthy that funeral rituals of a chief differ from that of an ordinary member of the community, so the two types of rituals will be discussed separately. The death of chiefs, especially that of the Kyungu, will be dealt with under the topic "rituals of chieftainship."

Perception of Death

As pointed out in chapter two, death among the Ngonde is not easily accepted; foul play is normally suspected.⁸⁶ In African context, death is normally caused by sorcery, spirits, curses or natural causes. It is very easy to believe that sorcery, witchcraft and evil magic cause death. These seem to be understood as the core causes of death. The spirits that are believed

⁸⁵ In some cases professional mourners are deployed whenever death occurs. See Francis Ng'ambi, *Professional Mourning among the Ngonde-Nyakuyasa of Northern Malawi*, Research Paper, Chancellor College, Zomba, 1990.

⁸⁶ Details of this aspect have been discussed in chapter 2.

to cause death are those that might have had a grudge against the person, or whose bodies were not properly buried, or who have been neglected by their relatives for some reason or the other. Deaths thought to be caused by the spirits are rare. Rather, in most cases people find or suspect someone in the village to be the cause. Relatives may beat the suspect to death, or may take other types of revenge which are less public.⁸⁷ Sometimes death may occur because of breaking a taboo or an oath.

Farewell to the Dying

If a member of the family is sick, whether as a result of witchcraft or of other reasons, other members take care of him. If the illness becomes terminal, more members of the extended family will come and some even travel from far. The idea is that they should witness the death and also encourage one another during the difficult period. It is also believed that the sick person feels much better when surrounded by his loved ones. It feels good to be present when a relative is about to die so that 'you can see her and talk to her for the last time.'⁸⁸ Since the sense of belonging is so strong among Malawians, dying alone is something that is not morally acceptable. Often during funeral ceremonies people, especially relatives, are blamed for abandoning the sick. The one who dies alone is looked at as being "antisocial" and therefore not well behaved.

When a member of the village dies, whether young⁸⁹ or old, a message goes round to inform the people about death. This is done after the chief has been notified by his nobles. The village headman reports to the nobles and they have to bring K200 from the bereaved family for the chief, which I was told is given back to the family in form of condolence from the chief.⁹⁰ People gather at the home of the funeral to comfort the bereaved. Women have to cook for the bereaved, and those who come from far. Attendance

⁸⁷ Clement Mmana, *Perceptions of Death in African Perspective: A Case Study of Likuni Parish*, MA Module, Mzuzu University, 2009.

⁸⁸ Int. Tayilesi Mwabungulu, Katolola Village, 11.8.2011

⁸⁹ This is of course different from the death of a newborn baby which is believed to be caused by *mioto*. It is believed that either the father or the mother, or others in the village were sexually immoral during the pregnancy. Burial of such a baby is done by women only. Because only a shallow grave is needed for a baby, men are not required for the digging and do not attend.

⁹⁰ Godfrey Wilson records that in the past, the family would send a hen to notify the chief of the death, and the chief would send a piece of cloth in return. Godfrey Wilson: *The Constitution of Ngonde*, London: Manchester University Press, 1939, p. 31.

at a funeral is compulsory and those who absent themselves might be accused of witchcraft or being "antisocial." Normally a person is buried within two days from the day he died if there are no problems. Burial is a time when a spirit is being escorted to rest among the ancestors, and it is treated with great respect. In fact, perpetual wailing is discouraged by 'the comforters,' because it is believed that the dead will not have a safe journey to the ancestors, or all he would see is 'darkness'; he would not be able to see the way.

When an elderly person dies, sons-in-law (*bakweni/bakoyi*) bring a cloth (*chitenje*) each and they cover the corpse with it. Those who find the body already placed in the coffin just put the cloth on top of the coffin. After burial they tear one of the cloths into small pieces and the bereaved tie on one of their wrists, or as a head band to stop the spirit of the dead from visiting them. The remains of the cloth are distributed among the bereaved women.⁹¹ Proper burial of the dead is of essence because spirits of the dead do return to the living to disturb them if certain things were not done properly or according to the demands of the dead before they died. For example, one informant shared that her father who died in 1999 had a safari suit which he loved so much and he mentioned, while he was still alive, that when he dies, he would love to be buried in it. Since the suit was nice, some of the relatives wanted to keep it and thought that the owner would not know as he was dead. Burial took place and the dead father kept appearing to the informant's aunt in dreams asking for his safari suit. The family members agreed to bury the suit to stop him from appearing to the aunt. They did not exhume the body but they just dug a little hole on his tomb big enough to cover the suit and buried it. After doing this, he stopped appearing to the aunt and she could sleep peacefully.⁹²

After burial of the dead, close relatives wash their hands with medicines on the grave to chase away the spirit of the dead which may 'stick' to their hands.⁹³ In some areas of Ngondeland, when a funeral takes place, they

⁹¹ Int. Twitike Mwabungulu, Katolola Village, 11.3.2011.

⁹² Int. N.N.

⁹³ In the past, the family members actually bathed the whole body to remove the smell of death and spirits from their bodies. The washing of hands is a case of reductionism, where symbolic rituals have replaced the original ones. The period of mourning has been reduced considerably, the issue of shaving is symbolic by laying a pair of scissors on the head or by cutting very little hair, etc.

don't sweep for three days, and on the third day, paternal aunts⁹⁴ do the sweeping and are given money at the end of the job. The specific amount of money was not mentioned but I was told that it was very little. This was not payment for doing the job but a custom. The third day is chosen for sweeping because those who are not close relatives, but had been sleeping at the funeral home, disperse on this day. Closer relatives may mourn the dead up to three weeks, a change from one month in the past.

A ritual that takes place especially when one's husband dies is known as *kunyaka*, which is done on the day when the sweeping (*kupyera*) is done.⁹⁵ On the day of the ritual which could be the third or fourth day after burial, the widow enters into her house and then starts weeping loudly. The parents (or guardians for those whose parents are dead) of the widow follow her into the house, they take her by the hand and then pretend as if they are going home with her.⁹⁶ The widow's in-laws follow them to redeem the widow and they pay K50 or K100 for them to release her. The longer the distance they cover in walking, the bigger the amount they will pay to redeem her. All this is done *kupepula malundi* (literally 'to lighten the legs'). If this ritual is not performed, it is believed that the widow will suffer from pains in the legs.⁹⁷

Feasting during Funerals

As pointed out earlier, funerals also provide an opportunity for feasting. When an adult dies, a cow must be slaughtered and lack of it may call for complaints and protests from the members of the public. In the past, the bereaved family could be victims of '*kigune*'⁹⁸ if they chose not to provide one. This is an important aspect of funerals for the Ngonde. In fact, if one died during the time when food was a problem, they postponed the

⁹⁴ A paternal aunt occupies an important place in Ngonde society. She is the one who advises a girl who has just had her first menstrual flow on how she should live her life, she counsels newly weds on sexual issues, she can curse (*kuguna*) her niece/nephew et cetera. In some Ngonde sub-cultures, *bipwa* (maternal uncles) do the sweeping called '*kupyaghila*' and it cannot take place without them.

⁹⁵ Int. Judith Mwakaswaya, Simoni Village, 11.5.2011.

⁹⁶ The Ngonde are a patriarchal society where the wife lives with the husband's family.

⁹⁷ According to some respondents, the underlying function is to show that the widow is not an orphan; she has parents or guardians who can keep her even though the husband has passed away, perhaps there is no one who wants to inherit her.

⁹⁸ See chapter 1 for more discussion on the concept of *kigune*.

mourning until food became available and then mourning would resume. Burial would take place but the mourners could disperse after a day or two and an announcement would be made as to when mourning would resume, that is when food would be available for the mourners. This system had implications for those concerned, especially the widow. For example, if the deceased was one's husband, the wife was not allowed to change clothes during the waiting period regardless of its length—whether a year or a month. In addition, sons-in-law were expected to bring a cow each to be slaughtered during the funeral which could last for a month. This could put a lot of pressure on those who could not afford a cow. Some could go into debt to find a cow. Mourners made sure that all the cows were eaten before dispersing. None of the bereaved was allowed to cut their hair until the proper mourning period was over.⁹⁹ Today, the maximum number of days for mourning is one week.

Another tradition that is common during funerals is that of *lupiyililo* where members of the wife's family bring food which may include a cow, money and a piece of cloth (*chitenje*) to the funeral.¹⁰⁰ The *chitenje* is tied on the waist (or belly) of their relative (in this case the bereaved wife). The name given to this waist band is *ngwamba*, which helps the one who is mourning to be strong by tightening the waist. All this is done when an elderly person dies and it is part of condolences from the wife's side. The food is very important because the many people who gather for quite a number of days need to eat.

The Funeral of a Father-in-law

Special mention should be made of the funeral of a father-in-law. If the one who has passed on is a father-in-law, the daughter-in-law (*mukamwana*) cannot view his body; it is a taboo for her to do that. In some areas of Ngondeland, the daughter-in-law is expected to cover her face with a cloth in order not to see the coffin and even his grave, which she is not permitted to look at.¹⁰¹ In addition, a daughter-in-law must not have sex with her husband or even talk to him until after the father-in-law's burial. In some areas, the woman has to cover herself even from her husband. In fact, her husband must give her money (*kubongozga*) before the two can begin to

⁹⁹ Int. Hastings Mwalwanda, Mwenengubwe Village, 30.3.2011.

¹⁰⁰ This is true when an adult, other than the wife, dies.

¹⁰¹ Steven Kauta Msiska also attests to this. A daughter in-law could hide even from her father-in-law's grave. *Golden Buttons: Christianity and Traditional Religion among the Tumbuka*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006, p. 34.

talk to each other. The husband has to throw the money on the ground and she has to pick it from the ground. If the two decide to have sex and ignore the rule, it is said that the woman will have water in her vagina and therefore cannot enjoy sexual relations with her husband. It is believed that this happens because the spirits of the dead, including that of the father-in-law, are angry with them. However, a mother-in-law's funeral is not surrounded by such complicated rituals.¹⁰² People can take a bath only after burial. When a father-in-law dies, daughters-in-law are tied with *milala* on the wrist of their left hand, and when the dead body is carried to the grave, they enter into the house where the dead body was lying and each one of them snaps it to symbolize their separation with him. The brother-in-law is the one who does the tying. The daughters-in-law do not go to the graveyard for burial.

The Ritual of Chieftainship

In the area of chieftainship, the ritual that used to provoke great interest among both the Nyakyusa and the Ngonde was that of 'coming out', when heirs of a chief were acknowledged as rulers, and power was handed over to them and their village headmen. This occurred once in a generation when the chief's senior sons were between thirty and thirty five years old. The coming out was traditionally the occasion when authority was handed over by the elder generation to the younger.¹⁰³ As opposed to Bunyakusa where two heirs of a chief were acknowledged, the Ngonde chose several brothers to undergo the ritual in order to distribute power. Bringing out only two would make them boastful and they may mistreat their people. The central point of the chief's coming out was the redistribution of power and of land. The old chief retired and he was expected to die shortly. Since the coming out of his sons indicated not only retirement, but a speedy death to a chief, he was reluctant to carry it out and would postpone it. The village headman often pushed him to celebrate, and he eventually had to accept their advice. However things changed with passage of time. The situation changed as chiefs continued to live longer after the coming out of their sons. The administration treated the chief as the sole authority, or the old men found good reasons for not holding the celebration at all. Before the ritual there was much speculation and excitement throughout the chieftdom and private discussions between the old chief and his village

¹⁰² Int. Ella Mwangolera, Kwiwula Village, 14.7.2011.

¹⁰³ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 50.

heads about suitable candidates or office. They looked for men of wisdom (*mahala*), skilled in settling disputes, modest, and providers of given to hospitality.¹⁰⁴ Today, when new chiefs are being chosen people look for similar qualities. After the ritual of coming out had died down, the *makambala*¹⁰⁵ assumed the power of deciding who was to be the next chief. They actually became the "kingmakers."¹⁰⁶ First, we will turn to the process of selection and installation of a village headman or a chief, and then later, to that of the Kyungu. These will be discussed separately because of the differences that exist between them.

Selection and Installation of a Village Headman or Chief¹⁰⁷

Selection of a village head is generally done by elders of the village. The one selected is expected to come from the royal family. Unlike chieftainship, village headmanship is hereditary. Being a patrilineal society, village headmanship goes to men except where all the men in her family have passed away. For instance, at the time of writing, two villages were under the leadership of women. Kasote village was under the leadership of a woman (a paternal aunt) while Kashata Village was under Group Village Headwoman Katumbi. The major quality one must have in order to be considered for the position of village headman or chief is wisdom (*mahala*). Another quality that the elders look for in a person is good behavior. The village headman must be someone who relates well with people, is cheerful, compassionate and hospitable and must not be proud. When the elders find such a person, they go to his father, paternal aunt or his elder brother (if the father is not available), to inform him or her of the elders' decision. Then, on a chosen day, the elders gather the members of the clan from which the village head has been chosen, to intimate and ask for their opinion. If they accept then they proceed with the plans to have the person installed as village head. Then, they inform Mpeta Mwakasungula, the head of the royal family, about the installation plans and they suggest a date for the installation. On the day, he sends his nobles to participate in the ceremony of installing the chief or village headman.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 51.

¹⁰⁵ *Makambala* (plural) and *likambala* (singular) is the Kyangonde name for advisors of the chief.

¹⁰⁶ Owen Kalinga, *A History of the Ngonde Kingdom of Malawi*, Berlin: Mouton, 1985, p. 68.

¹⁰⁷ The two are distinguished in rank, the chief is higher on the ladder.

Before the actual day of installation an announcement is made to the community that the choice of a new village head has been made and installation would be done soon. Then, the village headman-to-be is taken into seclusion together with his new *makambala*, about four of them. Anyone can be chosen as *likambala*, it is not restricted to the royal family. They are taken into a house where they are kept in seclusion for three to four days.¹⁰⁸ People are not allowed to pass near such a house – all paths are temporarily closed. Bodyguards are deployed to make sure that they are safe. They are protected because people are jealous and may plan to murder the new village head because many people desire to be chosen but are left out. When they go out to the bathroom, they cover themselves with *chitenje* (cloth) so that they should not be seen by people. They are provided with no beds, no blankets, but only *fitenje* (plural for *chitenje*). They are being trained to be brave and endure hardship. The village headman-to-be sleeps in the middle while *makambala* sleep on the sides, the first on his right, and the second on his left. The other two sleep on either side. The wife accompanies the chief-to-be, and also the wives of the chosen *makambala*. The wives of the *makambala* prepare meals and warm water for the men. The three-day seclusion provides them an opportunity to plan on how they will run the village. They also learn about the rules and regulations of the village.

On the day of installation, the one being installed is expected to provide a cow which is used for relish, since it is a big feast. The *makambala* slaughter it and they take a leg and share amongst themselves. On the day of coming out, they choose one village headman from the clan who comes with a spear and knocks with a loud bang on the door, to announce the coming of war.¹⁰⁹ The village-head-to-be gets up and catches the spear, and the two act as if they are fighting for possession of the spear. After a short while the old village headman leaves it to the new. The beating of *ndingala* (a type of drum) begins and the new chief begins dancing (*kukina*)¹¹⁰ with the spear while women are ululating, then sits down. The new chief is seated with his wife on chairs flanked by his *makambala*. Then, a chief's *likambala* will come and whip the new village headman on the shoulder with a medicinal stick and tells him that you are now ... [he mentions the name of the village headmanship he is inheriting]. The spear is a symbol of defense and

¹⁰⁸ This is different from the Lambya who stay indoors up to six weeks. See Levi Nyondo, *Brief History of the Lambya People*, PhD Module, Mzuzu University, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Chiefs are expected to defend their subjects in times of war. They must fight.

¹¹⁰ This is a war dance.

protection; which means that the chief will do that. The ceremony then begins with prayers and the preaching of God's Word and this is normally conducted by the clergy. Thereafter, the new village headman and his *makambala* are given some pieces of advice on what is expected of them in their new responsibilities to the village. They are advised to discharge their duties fairly and with integrity.¹¹¹ The chief's wife is also advised to welcome all who come to her house since she has become the mother of all. Greeting and congratulating the new village headman is also part of the programme where people bring their money and different kinds of gifts.

After the installation ceremony the new village headman plans to appear before the paramount chief Kyungu to make a courtesy call. This is done so that the paramount chief can know the new village headman. This is done for formality because by this time the chief already knows the village headman. On this visit the new village headman brings a cow to give as the gift to the paramount chief. He goes with his *makambala* and one of the elders from the village. An appointment is made with the paramount chief who sets a date. When they arrive at the paramount chief's place, his *mafumu* go to see the cow as a confirmation that they did bring one. The new village head then goes to greet the paramount chief. A *likambala* then gives the paramount chief a book where he reads something that is a kind of an oath – with both hands on the new village headman's head saying, "from today this land is yours, you must rule with authority." Then the chief ensures that the name is sent to the District Commissioner's office to inform government. It is only after his visit to paramount chief Kyungu that the new village headman knows that he has authority to rule. Then food is served and after eating they leave.

For chieftaincy one is picked from the following clans: Kanyighe, Mwakifwamba, Kambitoto, Wabola Mwahimba, Shamlomo Mwabwembe, Mwangwabila (all of whom are Mwangonde) and Mwamatope, who is the first Traditional Authority from the Karonga clan. When selecting a chief, a proposal is made by elders and they go to the parents of the particular person to tell them "*twaghogha mwana winu*" which literally means "we have killed your son." This was said because becoming a chief was not an easy thing and it was not uncommon for the chief to die quickly. For example, because the Kyungu was the divine king, he could never become ill. Once he became ill he would be smothered to death because illness in

¹¹¹ This is similar to what is done during the installation of a Yawo Chief. See Ian Dicks, "It Takes an Initiation to Make a Yawo Chief," *Religion in Malawi*, no. 16, 2010-2011, pp. 3-11.

the divine king would bring disaster on his community. This has not been followed since 1900s, but even today, chiefs are targets of witchcraft and jealousies, so, death is very close to them. After visiting the parents, a delegation comes to the elder brother and finally to the prospective chief to report on the selection. Finally, the chief-to-be goes into a seven-day period of seclusion with his wife¹¹² and five *makambala*. This is for planning for the future responsibility together with his *makambala*. The seclusion is the beginning of separation between the chief elect and his relatives. This separation continues at death. When a Traditional Authority (TA) dies, his relatives, including his nuclear family, cannot view his body. This is because in the past the chief could not be seen anyhow, he was kept in seclusion and that tradition is still adhered to in death. In addition, it is a taboo for a chief to view a dead body. A chief does not attend the burial even of his wife, son or daughter; he can not look at a dead body. But after burial, he can attend the funeral.¹¹³ TA Karonga, however, pointed out that he is always in dilemma when a cabinet minister who comes from his area dies and he is forced by circumstances to view the dead body. This is especially a problem if the head of state is in attendance and he is required to attend the funeral. A case in point was the time when Malawi's first lady, Her Excellency Madam Ethel Mutharika died. Chiefs were present at the funeral and when time came for viewing, TA Karonga asked his counterpart from Chitipa how he would go about it since he also observes the same taboo. Chief Mwaulambya said, "I will look aside." The chief decided to honour the taboo at the risk of being considered disrespectful by others, including the President of Malawi. When I asked paramount Chief Kyungu about the reasons for not looking at a body, he said that there are no clear reasons for that requirement. When I asked him again what would happen if he defied that, he smiled and said he thinks nothing could happen to him, however since it is something that is recognized by the society, it is important that he adheres to it.¹¹⁴ In addition, he does not go to the graveyard to bury his loved ones or even outsiders due to the same tradition. He just mourns his loved ones at home

The installation and celebration of a chief are similar to the rituals that occur when installing a village headman.

¹¹² If the chief is polygamous, only the first wife goes with him into seclusion.

¹¹³ Int. Wilford Mwamatope, T.A. Karonga, Mwamatope Village 22.11.2010.

¹¹⁴ Int. Lacky Maluluma Mwanyongo (Paramount Chief Kyungu), Mwambuli Village, 3.3.2011.

Selection and Installation of the Kyungu

After the ritual of coming out had died down, the responsibility to choose a new Kyungu lay in the hands of the *makambala*. Being a patriarchal society, the candidate to Kyunguship had to be male, a descendant of the first Kyungu, and, normally, the son of a Kyungu. When one of the Kyungus died, immediately the *makambala* selected a new Kyungu whose name was presented to the spirits of the departed by Mulwa, the *likambala* in charge of the rituals. As soon as the divining rod indicated that the spirits had accepted the choice, the Kyungu to-be was called to Mbande without notice of what was going to happen. On his arrival he was asked to enter the Kyungu's house and as he passed near Ngosi, one of the *makambala*, who was this time dressed in the Kyungu's attire and sitting on the Kyungu's bed, the prince was seized and told of the decision of the ancestral spirits to make him Kyungu. He was crowned and the drum, *Mwenekelwa*, was immediately sounded to inform the people of the installation of a new ruler. The new Kyungu had to eat *ifingira* (a mixture containing the potent of flying serpent, *nyifwira*), hair and flesh from different parts of the body of his immediate predecessor. The great medicines for chieftainship served a very important function. They were supposed to create spiritual power, dignity and majesty in order to make the chief fearsome so that men can obey him. The Ngonde also thought that the chiefs or headmen should be heavy with pythons in their bellies (*mbungulu*) which give them the power to see and fight witches. *Ifingira* was also thought to give courage and ferocity in war. He was also anointed with lion's fat, given the royal stick and spear and a lion's skin on which to sit.¹¹⁵ It was believed that by the time the new Kyungu had gone through all the rituals on Mbande Hill, he was ready to lead his people and protect them. Some of the practices have been maintained while others have been modified.

Today, the one chosen is not seized as in the past. And in contrast to the past when the candidate to Kyunguship had to be the son of a Kyungu, there are now seven households from which he can be chosen. When the seat of Kyungu falls vacant, the elders of the Mwakasungula clan and their *makambala* sit down to decide on who should take over the mantle from the deceased one. It is obvious that the one who is heir to that position must come from the royal family, but, unlike what takes place in Mzimba where the first born son takes over the chieftainship; there are several royal families from which one can be chosen. A Kyungu can come from any of the

¹¹⁵ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 51.

following seven families: Mwakabanga, Mwanganda, Mwanyongo, Malema, Mwakiyula, Mwakatundu and Mwangwewo. Normally, the most important quality they look for in a person is wisdom (*mahala*). However, these days, education also matters. When a name is suggested, they go to Mpeta Mwakasungula to report and then to Senior Traditional Authority Karonga.¹¹⁶ When the Karonga approves the name, then it is reported to the District Commissioner and then the President. For the Kyungu, no new *makambala* are chosen, they maintain the old ones who already know the rules and regulations of Kyunguship. It is important to note that Mwakasungula and Kyungu have permanent *makambala* who come from particular families, no one outside these families can be chosen. For instance, they come from the families of Kaisi, Mwalilino, Mwakiongo and others.

When this is done, the *makambala* arrange for the inauguration of the new chief. Just like the village headman, the Kyungu goes into a one week seclusion, and comes out the seventh day.¹¹⁷ He does this together with the first wife (if polygamous), and his *makambala*. After a week, he is taken by the *makambala* to Mbande Hill where the traditional installation takes place around ten o'clock at night, and they carry lanterns and torches with them.¹¹⁸ He is made to sit on the traditional stone chair and is told not to be afraid, not to shout, not to run away, not to cry because strange and fierce things will happen to him. He must endure all this to show that he is tough. If the ancestral spirits have approved of the new chief, a big snake, which never dies, comes and plays with him, licks him and goes away. If the spirits have not approved of him, it becomes very angry and people ran away. It is alleged that during the traditional installation of a certain Kyungu at Mbande, the policemen who escorted the chief-to-be to Mbande ran away

¹¹⁶ Even though the house of Karonga has always been recognized as a senior branch of the royal family, no member of it has ever been made Kyungu. Tradition has it that one of the Karongas refused to take over the Kyunguship when it fell vacant, but instead pointed to his brother Mwakasungula to take over.

¹¹⁷ The seven days are the ones that everybody else knows. It is believed that the Kyungu goes into seclusion for one month before his *makambala* join him.

¹¹⁸ This is very significant. Traditional installation of Chief Kyungu at Mbande takes place at night just like his burial. Some secrecy is observed during these two rituals which take on the clothes of 'respect'. A woman who stays at the foot of Mbande Hill told me that at one point she was warned by elders of the village to put her dogs in chains because people would pass by going to Mbande Hill for a ritual. They did pass around 9.30 p.m.

after the snake became very wild because it refused to accept him. The elders had to sit down again to choose a new chief.

A few *makambala* go up Mbande Hill with one woman who does ululation. When they reach the foot of the hill, the woman crawls to the top of the hill, no walking, as a sign of respect. The whole group goes up hill and a big light shines, then they seat the new chief on the stone chair. Light goes off for a while and then on again. He finds himself naked; a big snake comes and licks him throughout his body and takes things (a mixture of hair, finger nails, mucus etc.) and puts them inside him through magic. Light goes off again, he finds himself dressed again.¹¹⁹ When he comes back from Mbande Hill people fear him because he is no longer an ordinary person. People actually tremble in his presence because of the mystical power that goes into him. The things that are put in him are removed at death. How this is done remains a mystery.

The new chief is also made to eat some medicine which is mixed with certain parts of the body of his predecessor. Tradition has it that when a chief dies, the *makambala* remove certain parts of his body such as the tip of the tongue, finger nails, his hair and other parts which are dried and are mixed with food and medicines which the new chief takes.¹²⁰ The fact that chiefs do possess medicine was confirmed by one of Kyungu's sons, Karonga, when he refused to take over Kyunguship many years ago

But when the nobles of Ngonde tried to install him as Kyungu 'he himself refused the position, he smeared ash on his body and refused, he foreswore the position saying 'I do not desire the name Kyungu; my brother Mwakasungula here was our father's companion for many years and all the *medicines* of chieftainship are in his possession; how is it that you take me instead of him? And it is he that has done the fighting not I' and so they caught Mwakasungula to be the Kyungu.¹²¹ [*italics mine*]

¹¹⁹ There are different versions on how the medicines get into the chief's body. Some claim that the new chief eats the food mixed with the medicine, others think that the snake inserts the medicines into his body, while others believe that the *makambala* insert them into his body during installation at Mbande at a time when he is considered to be half dead.

¹²⁰ The importance of these medicines has already been discussed in the preceding pages. For details see Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 57-63.

¹²¹ Godfrey Wilson, *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Manchester University Press, 1939, pp. 27f.

Medicines and chieftainship are inseparable because the chief's power, dignity and majesty reside in them.¹²² The fact that Chief Kyungu is not allowed to view dead bodies, even those of his loved ones is attributed to the medicines that they take which may not serve the Kyungu well if he violates the regulations. Others believe that if he can violate these regulations, there will be a heavy downpour or some other disaster may occur.¹²³

On the day of coming out, the cow and the food that is eaten on this day are contributed by the villagers. The government now takes part in the celebration because paramount chiefs fall under the Ministry of Local Government and as such, government officials do attend the function. Traditional dances are held on this day as people celebrate the installation of the new chief. The new chief now takes on the title of Kyungu and people address him as such. This shows that there is a continuation of leadership, the one who rules does so on behalf of the one who has died.¹²⁴

Death Rituals for a Kyungu

Kyungu is known as *Ntemi gwa batemi* (chief of chiefs) because he is paramount over chiefs Wasambo to the South, Karonga at the centre, and Kilupula to the north – in Karonga – and virtually all the chiefs in Chitipa district. All chiefs in Karonga and Chitipa districts were sub chiefs of Kyungu before independence in 1964. The current Kyungu was elevated to the position of paramount chief on 13th November, 1999 at Mbande Hill.¹²⁵

The former Paramount Chief Kyungu died during the period of my research, on Friday, 22nd July 2011 and was buried on Sunday, 24th July 2011. Some of the traditional rituals that were being practiced in the past are still being held to. For example, when the chief dies, people do not refer to him as dead; they say he is sleeping. Only elderly women are allowed access into the room where the dead body is laid. No wailing is allowed, only a bell called *kabulisi* or *kabulira* is heard ringing throughout the period until burial

¹²² This is not restricted to the Ngonde. During the enthronement of the Bimbi as village headman, he and his wife were given "a ritual bath with special traditional medicine to protect them from the evils of society such as jealousies, witchcraft, sorcery, gossip and others." See James Amanze, *African Traditional Religion in Malawi: The Case of the Bimbi Cult*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2002, p. 50.

¹²³ Int. Beyard Kwiwula, Village Headman, Kwiwula Village, 16.7.2011.

¹²⁴ James Amanze, *African Traditional Religion: The Case of the Bimbi Cult*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2002, p. 48.

¹²⁵ Int. Lucky Maluluma Mwanyongo (Paramount Chief Kyungu), 3.3.2011.

takes place. Normally, the princesses take turns ringing the bell.¹²⁶ The coffin in which the chief was laid could not be displayed in public as per Ngonde culture. Although the then State President of the Republic of Malawi, Bingu wa Mutharika, was present during the funeral ceremony, they could not release the coffin for people to pay their last respects or lay their wreaths on it. In fact, Mpeta Mwakasungula, a representative of the royal family, referred to the displaying of the coffin as *mwiko* (taboo) and he gave apologies to the state president for not availing the coffin. The late paramount chief encouraged the observance of the Ngonde culture, which, according to him was eroding. During an interview with him, he mentioned that they stopped burying the Kyungus at Mbande for some time, but there was a general feeling that they should resume the practice. True to his word, his body was buried at Mbande Hill, the Headquarters of the Ngonde.

Andrew Mwafongo, a son to Chief Kyungu, said in an interview that burial took place at night as a sign of respect to the Kyunguship and the culture of the Ngonde.¹²⁷ He further said that "the Ngonde are very strong on keeping the culture of their forefathers and they do not want it to be forgotten or destroyed. This is what used to happen in the past and they cannot change it."¹²⁸ The Paramount Chief Kyungu was buried at night only by other chiefs as is the Ngonde custom. It was even difficult to see the coffin. When people were going to Mbande, only a small light could be seen, nothing else. To have buried him during the day would have been a sign of disrespect to the chief ("*Kupeputsa komanso kusintha chikhalidwe*") as his son put it, during a Chichewa interview with a news reporter. The funeral service took place outside the chief's residence.

The burying of chiefs at night is not restricted to the Ngonde. The Lambya do the same.¹²⁹ Burying at night is a tradition that the Ngonde value. Many reasons have been given for this tradition. One of the overt reasons is that it is done out of respect. However, there are some latent reasons that some may regard as mere speculation which include the claim that the chief cannot go alone. Tradition says that in the past, they used to bury the chief

¹²⁶ Int. Wilford Mwamatope (T.A. Karonga), Mwamatope Village, 22.11.2010.

¹²⁷ Int. Andrew Mwafongo by Martha Chirambo of *Weekend Nation* of Saturday, 30th July, 2011 of news article entitled "Mwambo woika mfumu usiku: Mwana wa Kyungu atambasula mwambo wa Ankhonde."

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Levi Nyondo, *Brief History of the Lambya People*, PhD Module, Mzuzu University, 2009.

with two slaves, one at the head and another at the legs as '*msamiro*'.¹³⁰ Another tradition claims that "one or two of his wives and sons of commoners were buried with him."¹³¹ People needed not to see this so it was done at night. When slavery was abolished, the *makambala* could choose any two boys in the village and the parents could not say a word since the chief had to go with them. There was a time when boys would run away from the village upon hearing that the chief had died for fear of being caught for *msamiro*.¹³² When one's child was chosen, parents could not object, if they did, they would be killed. With passage of time, burying people alive became unacceptable, instead live sheep were used. The use of sheep is now explained biblically with reference to Jesus' divine kingship.¹³³ Informants differed on the colour of the sheep that were used. Some indicated that an all-white sheep was used representing purity. Others stated that colour did not really matter but the sheep was not expected to have mixed colours. If one chooses a black sheep, it must be all black, if white then all white. There is still an element of purity here, because mixture stands for contamination. However, there are some who believe that if a chief were buried during the day, he would turn into a lion because of the medicines he takes during installation.

¹³⁰ The idea of burying the chief with live people was also common among the Tumbuka. Burial of chiefs or heads of clans was done together with their servants and wives. "These servants and wives were buried alive to serve the chiefs in the underworld and to maintain their dignity there." Steven Kauta Msiska, *Golden Buttons: Christianity and Traditional Religion among the Tumbuka*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006, p. 34. – The same was the law among the Nyamwanga in South West Tanzania. The first *Christian* chief, Mukoma, broke the "law" and declared that neither one of his wives nor any other living being must be buried with him. This made his son Alinafe even refuse to bury a living hen with the chief that the tribal elders had proposed as a substitute for the chief's wife (Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture. Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania 1900 – 1940*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 1999, p. 73, (*Missionsblatt der Brüdergemeinde*, 1916, p. 258f).

¹³¹ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 41.

¹³² Int. Lotson Mwakanema, Mwambuli Village, 19.7.2011.

¹³³ Int. Lotson Mwakanema, Mwambuli Village, 19.7.2011. There seems to be Christian influence in the interpretation. Another church leader, who plays an active role in the issues to do with chieftaincy, claims that the sheep was chosen because it is meek (but strong) and dignified, it is even used to refer to Jesus. The sheep does not even bleat because of its meekness, but I suspect that they inject it with some medicine to stop it from bleating.

Those who buried Chief Kyungu (Lacky Maluluma Mwanyongo) were a few selected *makambala*. Even the digging of the grave is done by *makambala*, not *wazukulu* as is the practice during funerals of ordinary Ngonde. Since he was a Presbyterian, prayers were held at his residence in Mwambuli Village in Karonga while the coffin was in seclusion. The state president, the clergy, women's guild members and others who were assigned to lay wreaths did so on a table placed in the center of the area where the prayers were being held. This exercise of last respects was a symbolic farewell. His two wives also laid their wreaths to bid farewell to their departed husband.¹³⁴ This ceremony was referred to by the clergy as "*kulailana kwa chikhristu*" (a Christian farewell). As is the tradition, wailing began after burial and following the sounding of the *Mbata*. Before burial, only clapping of hands and ululation could be heard. After the burial, one of the elders began to wail. This was the signal for everyone to begin weeping. In the evening, various kinds of dances were held, the favourite being *indingala*, a dance that is normally performed during ceremonies held to respect chiefs.

For an Ngonde, life would be meaningless without rituals. Many ceremonies are accompanied by rituals to be meaningful. Although there are remarkable changes in the rituals that the Ngonde perform today, it is obvious that adherence to the traditions and related rituals continues to be critical to community life. This is what brings people together and provides a strong identity to them. The rituals also provide a social boundary between the Ngonde and others and that is why some secrecy is involved in the way they are carried out. For individuals, rituals help them realize that they are legitimate members of Ngonde society.

¹³⁴ See also Moses Mlenga, *Polygamy in Northern Malawi. A Christian Reassessment*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2016, pp. 194-195.

Chapter 3: "Two Realities of a Different Kind"

This chapter will discuss Ngonde Christians' dual involvement in the religious traditions of Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). Many Ngonde Christians do not appear to completely abandon traditional religious practices after becoming Christians and they appear to practice what we may call "dual religiosity." Many Christians practise two religions, Christianity and ATR concurrently, and ATR is usually practised depending on specific demands upon their lives. One of the elements that need to be borne in mind is that African Traditional Religion is a collection of practices and ideas which pertain to daily life. As a result some of these practices are observed for cultural or social reasons. Mulago points out that "some of the things we call religion in ATR are not religion at all but just philosophy."¹ It is not necessarily obvious to those Ngonde Christians that they are involved in dual religiosity. For them it is simply their way of life; it is their culture. There is an overlap between culture and African Traditional Religion. Despite the overlap, there are cultural beliefs and practices which are clearly religious, while there are others which may not be considered religious. For instance, there is wide belief among the Ngonde that when a woman sits on a mortar she will not be able to have children. This is a belief, but not a religious belief. However, "clapping hands at night is prohibited, except openly in a dance, for spirits do so, and imitation might be regarded as mockery, not flattery."² This belief could be considered religious because it touches on spirits, one of the elements of ATR. Some beliefs are mere traditions—the conventions of society.

Traditional beliefs are those beliefs that we assimilate from our culture and hold dearly, those that at the same time get hold of us. It is not simply the case that those who believe or practice certain beliefs are prone to practice dual religiosity. It is a matter of faith. What is it that one is putting his or her faith in? It must be pointed out that it is not always the case that faith makes sense to all at all times, because issues of faith are matters of conviction. For example, there is a strong belief among the Ngonde that when you are passing by a grave site and you hear your name being called,

¹ Vincent Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," in Jacob K. Olupona (ed), *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, Minnesota: Paragon, 1991, p. 130.

² Duncan R. Mackenzie, *The Spirit Ridden Konde*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1925, p. 99.

you must not answer or look back, and if you do you will die. People, including Christians, also believe in this and will not do it for fear of death. My point here is not to argue whether it is true or not that one will die if she answers or looks back. My point is to show that faith in these beliefs can and does co-exist with faith in Christ for a Christian. Another example would be the hooting of an owl. If that happens it is either a witch has come to harm you, or the owl is announcing bad news, there will be death in the village and so on. Sometimes some Christians are tempted to uphold such beliefs, based on tradition. This may also account for dual religiosity for a Christian. Certain taboos are observed by Christians and yet they are religiously unchristian.

The dual involvement under discussion can be in terms of perceptions, rituals or activities. Many Ngonde Christians get involved in dual religiosity at different levels. Some do have a casual belief in ATR, while others are religiously committed to it. In this study, a Christian is said to practise dual religiosity when he or she incorporates elements of ATR into his or her daily life, values them and believes that the two should function together. This is different from a one-time involvement³ where one is forced, tricked, or persuaded to get involved in a ritual, or visit a diviner or traditional healer, etc, and yet does not really subscribe to its teaching and it is not habitual for them.⁴ The main issue is about holding the view that the two religions are important to them so that as Christians they cannot live without the other—without questioning or problematizing the coexistence of the two religious belief systems in their lives.

The main questions that this chapter will attempt to answer are: What practices (if any) highlight Ngonde Christians' dual religiosity? How do Ngonde Christians negotiate dual religiosity? Are there any differences in the Christians' involvement in dual religiosity? Is there any relationship between one's level of Christian commitment and dual religious involvement? Based on the research findings of this study, there is evidence that many Ngonde Christians do practise dual religiosity in different ways,

³ Mention should be made here that such cases will still be presented to show the extent to which Christians are involved in elements of African Traditional Religion but I will be careful to qualify such involvement.

⁴ I am aware that in religion it is not only the outward actions that matter, for it has to do with the heart, and this complicates the whole issue, for the habits might not really tell what is in the hearts. In addition, those who are Christians may not overtly show that they also subscribe to another religion, unless there is a crisis in their lives.

regardless of their awareness of it.⁵ Many of the people that were interviewed in this study were professing Christians, some of whom were dedicated leaders in their churches. Many of them confessed to have been involved in ATR elements; some persistently, others casually and yet some due to pressure from others. It is noteworthy that some are involved because they belong to churches which are tolerant to elements of ATR. The Christians that are under discussion belong to different denominations namely, Church of the Central African Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Assemblies of God, Living Waters, Pentecostal Holiness Association, Last Church of God and his Christ, African International Church, Baptist Convention, New Apostolic Church, African Methodist Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran, Anglican, and several others. Before I go into the details of the involvement of Christians in ATR elements, it is necessary to show how Christianity came to the Ngonde.

The Christian Faith Comes to Ungonde

Much has been written on the coming of Christianity to Malawi, but since this study dwells on Christianity and African Traditional Religion, just a brief history will be of essence here. The coming of Christianity to Malawi is attributed to David Livingstone, a Scottish missionary and medical doctor, who led exploratory expeditions in the 19th Century. His expeditions helped open up Central Africa to missions and several started making their way to Malawi.⁶

The first Christian Mission to come to Malawi was the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA),⁷ which was formed in 1861 in response to David Livingstone's request to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge to send out a mission to continue the missionary work he had started in Africa.

⁵ Some Christians who practise elements of ATR were not aware that they are being loyal to two religions. What they were doing appears normal to them, and they were surprised to hear that there was a possibility of them being dual religious.

⁶ Andrew Ross, "Livingstone and the Aftermath: the Origins and Development of Blantyre Mission," in Bridglal Pachai (ed), *Livingstone: Man of Africa*, Longman, 1973, pp. 191-217.

⁷ This was a High Church Anglican Missionary Society which was a joint effort of the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Dublin. For its history see G.H. Wilson, *The History of the Universities Mission to Central Africa*, London: UMCA, 1936. Available in Malawi is: James Tengatenga, *The UMCA in Malawi. A History of the Anglican Church 1861-2010*, Zomba: Kachere, 2010.

Initially, it did not touch Ungonde. Only in the early 1970s was the first Anglican parish established at Kasoba⁸ and now there are nine Anglican congregations in Ngonde territory.⁹ It is noteworthy that the Anglican Church came to Karonga from Tanzania.¹⁰ Today the Ngonde Anglican parishes belong to the Diocese of Northern Malawi.¹¹

Livingstonia Mission

The Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland was started among the Yao at Cape Maclear, in Southern Malawi, in October 1875, by Robert Laws who set out for Central Africa to establish a mission, which was to be evangelistic, educational and industrial.¹² Laws' three objectives were in line with Livingstone's original mission of bringing Commerce, Civilization and Christianity. Initially, Robert Laws was considered as a temporary member of the missionary team, but ended up staying for fifty-two years and the name Livingstonia mission appears to be synonymous with his name.¹³

From Cape Maclear, Livingstonia mission station kept moving up north, due to, among other factors, the presence of mosquitoes which caused malaria and because of black water fever. Several missionaries died of malaria. Apart from the presence of mosquitoes, Cape Maclear had other challenges, which included its being enclosed by rocky hills, and as a result, the mission had limited agricultural land. Furthermore, the mission was located on the edge of an infertile, tsetse-infected plain, which was hostile

⁸ According to Rev. Mtekateka, in Karonga, the Anglican Church started at Kasoba and was later shifted to Karonga boma, but there is still a big congregation (in terms of numbers) at Kasoba. The congregation at Karonga Boma, St. Ambrose, boasted of 760 members at the time of writing.

⁹ Int. Rev. L. Mtekateka, St. Ambrose Anglican Church, 14.3.2012. The congregations are St. John's at Lughali, St Ambrose at Karonga boma, St. Mary's at Kasoba, St. Justin at Fwira, Mwenitete, St. Paul's at Kaporo, St. Peters at Mwangulukulu, St. Michaels at the border (between Karonga and Tanzania), St. Dominic at Bwililo and Holy Trinity at Mpata.

¹⁰ Int. Rev. L. Mtekateka, St. Ambrose Anglican Church, 14.3.2012.

¹¹ For a study of the role of women in the diocese see: Oswald Jimmy Banda, *The Role of Women in the Anglican Diocese of Northern Malawi*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2013.

¹² Hamish McIntosh, *Robert Laws: Servant of Africa*, Carberry: Handsel Press, 1993, p. 27.

¹³ John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 69.

to animal life, and was therefore unfavourable for a mission station. Although the location had such challenges, Cape Maclear was home to Livingstonia mission for six years.¹⁴

In 1881 the mission station moved from Cape Maclear in the south to Bandawe in the north of Malawi. The situation was much different in the north because unlike among the Yao, the mission was welcomed in the north. The move to Bandawe was to be temporary and Robert Laws was advised not to spend much on buildings but instead to keep searching for a good place for final settlement. The new site at Bandawe had its own challenges ranging from health to lack of space for a harbour. It also lacked protection from winds and waves. As a result of all this, the team was reluctant to permanently settle at Bandawe.¹⁵ Then in 1894, Livingstonia Mission established its headquarters at Khondowe high on the plateau, which was much cooler, compared to the lakeshore areas, and therefore free from mosquitoes. The mission established Overtoun Institution, which later became the centre of educational work not only for Malawi, but also for the whole of Central Africa.¹⁶ The Overtoun Institution was named after Lord Overtoun (John Campbell White), who, together with James Stevenson, donated a large sum of money to the institution.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that the mission team moved to new stations while maintaining the previous ones. Some people, especially Malawians were made in charge of some of the stations like Cape Maclear.¹⁸ However, in some mission stations like Bandawe, white missionaries were left in charge.¹⁹

Livingstonia Mission in Karonga

Although the Livingstonia mission had a wider sphere of influence, it had greater impact in the northern region where major mission stations were

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 85.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 90.

¹⁶ For a look at the Overtoun Institution from a local perspective see: Happy Nyambose, *The Establishment and Contribution of the Overtoun Institute in Northern Malawi and Beyond (1895-2010)*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2015.

¹⁷ Livingstonia Mission Committee minutes, 13 March and 14 June 1894.

¹⁸ For example, Albert Namalembe was in charge of what remained of Cape Maclear mission station after the missionaries moved the site to Bandawe. Namalembe was Livingstonia Mission's first convert. W. Scott to R. Laws, 30 October 1884, Shepperson Collection; Livingstonia News, August 1908, p. 40.

¹⁹ For impressions of Bandawe and New Bandawe Missions in the 1920s, written by a woman missionary, see: Margaret Sinclair, *Salt and Light*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2003.

established at Ekwendeni and Loudon in Mzimba, Bandawe in Nkhata Bay, Livingstonia at Khondowe in Rumphu and Karonga. Established in 1881, the Karonga mission station was originally situated at Chirenje, near Mweniwanda's village, about 80 km from Karonga under the leadership of James Stewart.²⁰ Stewart died two years later, and Rev. J. Alexander Bain took up the post in 1884. The only advantage of the site of the mission station was that it was situated close to the unfinished Stevenson's Road which would enable access to various supplies. However, the station had many disadvantages. First, the station was separated from the lake and the residents were a mixture of different tribes and spoke three different languages. Secondly, food supplies were hard to get. Finally, the African Lakes Company²¹ depot was too close and the mission station was sometimes wrongly perceived as an extension of the company. Following this, Bain decided to move the station to another place, but the death of two members of staff and the war that broke out in 1887 between the Swahili and their Ngonde hosts delayed the move.²² The war negatively affected the missionary work at Chirenje, with two missionaries moving out to other places, leaving the station in the hands of untrained African agents. The work declined and many inhabitants fled to other places due to continued war and hunger. By 1910, the station looked deserted, with just one school which had a low student population.²³

After taking a short break at Bandawe after the war, Bain decided to cross the borders and establish missionary work among the Nyakyusa of Tanzania. This did not work because this area was under the influence of the German Moravian missionaries. He settled therefore in Ukukwe at

²⁰ James McCarthy, *The Road to Tanganyika: The Diaries of Donald Munro and William McEwan*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006, p. 23.

²¹ African Lakes Company was a trading company which was established to achieve the objective of bringing lawful commerce to Africa. African Lake's Company was formerly known as Livingstonia Central African Trading Company. James McCarthy, *The Road to Tanganyika: The Diaries of Donald Munro and William McEwan*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006, p. 19. See also Frederick L. Moir, *After Livingstone: An African Trade Romance*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.; Frederick Moir, "The Story of the African Lakes Corporation," in Leo Weinthal (ed), *The Story of the Cape to Cairo Railway and River Route*, Vol. 1, London, nd.

²² Owen Kalinga: "The Karonga War: Commercial Rivalry and Politics of Survival," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 21/2, 1980, pp. 204-218.

²³ John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, pp. 139-140.

Kararamuka village. Kerr Cross decided to join him but could not stay long because the risk for white missionaries to be attacked by Arabs was high. Kerr Cross returned to Karonga and was sent on an exploratory tour to find a new site for the mission station in Karonga. In 1892, he settled at Ngerenge, 21 km North West of Karonga. However, this was not a perfect location because it was isolated from the main routes into the interior, although it was close enough to be supervised from Karonga.²⁴

In 1894, Robert Laws heard some rumours that the Roman Catholic White Fathers were planning to occupy Karonga. Since Livingstonia mission already had a station established in Karonga, where Kerr Cross had taught three hundred Ngonde refugees in 1889, and where Kydd, an agent of the African Lakes Company, assisted in building a school near the company's yard in 1891, Laws sent George Aitken to take the site before them. This appeared to be the suitable place for the mission. When Aitken was joined by Cross in 1895, Karonga was already becoming an active missionary centre, reaching out to several Ngonde villages. The mission concentrated on evangelistic and educational work.²⁵

Progress of Mission Work among the Ngonde

Missionary penetration was such a challenge among the Ngonde that Livingstonia mission made very little progress in terms of making converts. This was the case despite the fact that the Ngonde normally found refuge in missionary camps when they were being attacked by the Swahili Arabs and their Henga²⁶ supporters. At times, the Europeans fought the Arabs on their behalf.²⁷ McCracken reports that the Henga who lived among the Ngonde were more receptive to the missionaries than the Ngonde themselves. At the end of 1894 Ngerenge and Karonga mission stations combined had only three Ngonde converts and about 150 pupils in mission schools. Those who took education more seriously were those who came from outside Karonga, the Henga, who used their education for trading purposes, and became

²⁴ Ibid. p. 141.

²⁵ For a history of "Karonga Old Mission" and the congregations that developed from it, see: Frank Kadogana, *The Origin and Growth of Karonga CCAP Mission in Karonga and Chitipa from 1900 – 2013*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2015.

²⁶ The Henga were members of the Tumbuka tribe that dwelt in the Henga valley. The Henga found themselves in Ngondeland as they fled from Ngoni attacks in the 1880s. When they settled in Karonga they continued to use their Henga language for communication purposes. D.D. Phiri, *History of Malawi: From Earliest Times to the Year 1915*, Blantyre: CLAIM, 2004, pp. 39, 51.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 142.

successful traders. It is not surprising therefore that the Henga controlled the teaching and evangelistic work using the Henga language. A mission report noted that the Ngonde were "slow to move, extremely conservative, and suspicious of the new movements going on all around them."²⁸ As late as 1925, Duncan Ross Mackenzie wrote:

They have never attached themselves to the Europeans as many of the surrounding tribes have done ... educationally, too they are less advanced ... nor have they supplied, in any number, the trained assistants in mission work who form one of the principal successes of missions among other tribes.²⁹

The industrial as well as the good literary training that the Europeans offered was appealing to Africans because the skills gained enabled them to be employed, thereby getting financial benefits in return. Such being the case, the Ngoni, Tonga and Tumbuka (the Henga inclusive) made efforts to go to Livingstonia to obtain the necessary skills. However, the Ngonde did not see any reason to go to school because they were better off economically. Alexander Dewar commented that "children had to be hunted up daily to go to school."³⁰ This implies that not many were converted to Christianity since the schools were also evangelistic tools, "the first pupils became in their turn the first teachers, and the first converts," and many of those who went to school did so to become Christians.³¹

It became necessary for Robert Laws, as head of the Livingstonia Mission, to persuade the Kyungu and subordinate chiefs to send some of their sons to school. When the chiefs did, some among the sons became the first converts. Following this, Christianity spread and in the end, as Monica

²⁸ Cross to Laws, 18 September 1891, NLS 7895, to members of the Livingstonia Sub-committee, 23 August 1894, NLS 7878, to Smith, 2 November 1894, NLS 7878; Livingstonia Mission Report, January-June 1895; January to June, 1911, p. 38, quoted in John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875 – 1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 142.

²⁹ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 37.

³⁰ Alexander Dewar to George Smith, 30 October 1899, NLS 7882, in John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 156.

³¹ See John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875 – 1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 133 and Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 173.

Wilson observes, many women were converted through the boys who went to school. This happened in the following manner: A mother followed her son in search of baptism or a girl the man she was to marry. It was a requirement that a Christian boy had to marry a Christian girl who had been baptized. Through this way, women outnumbered men as much as three times in Ngonde congregations of the Presbyterian Church. The boys who went to school picked up jobs as teachers, evangelists, medical assistants, clerks, store keepers, artisans, house-servants and police officers.³²

Another barrier to missionary penetration was the religious position of the Kyungu. As a divine king, it was believed that the wellbeing of the community lay in his health. If the Kyungu was wounded or ill, the whole community would suffer. Prior to the coming of Christianity, the nobles would put him to death if he complained of any ailment in order to preserve the strength of their land. Droughts, which were uncommon in Ngonde, were believed to occur because of the action of a Kyungu living or dead. When they occurred, his nobles and sub-chiefs visited him at his capital, Mbande, from all over Karonga, bringing gifts and requesting for help.³³ The gifts were meant to appease the living Kyungu if he was the one responsible for withholding the rain. This explains why the Ngonde were resistant to the gospel because Livingstonia mission was striking at the core of the traditional ruler's power and of the unity of the tribe.³⁴

Obviously, the European missionaries did introduce a new set of religious ideas and a new form of social grouping among the Ngonde. While among the Nyakyusa, a new type of village, a Christian village, was established on mission land, the situation was different among the Ngonde, where the converts stayed in their own villages and were expected to spread the gospel among their people. The difference arises from the fact that two different missions evangelized the two people groups and therefore had different policies for their missions; the Scottish mission operating in

³² Monica Wilson, *For Men and Elders: Change in the Relations of Generations and of Men and Women among the Nyakyusa-Ngonde People 1875-1971*, New York: Africana, 1977, p. 171. A handful of girls, who continued school for eight years (to standard 6), became teachers. Ibid. p. 172.

³³ Godfrey Wilson: *The Constitution of the Ngonde*, Manchester University Press, 1939, pp. 29-35; Duncan Ross Mackenzie *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London, 1925, pp. 68-69. See more details of divine kingship in chapter 1.

³⁴ John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, ²2000, p. 144.

Ngonde, and the Moravian and Lutheran missions operating in BuNyakyusa. The Scottish mission's approach was to keep the converts in their society, whereas the Moravians and Lutherans who worked among the Ngonde cousins, the Nyakyusa, preferred to withdraw their converts from the surrounding pagan community.³⁵

In the late 1920s, some Africans wanted to break free from European led churches because, among other factors, they wanted freedom. One of the major reasons was that the missionary churches were not tolerant towards some indigenous religious traditions and some cultural issues, which they felt, were important to the Ngonde and Malawians in general. After the First World War, two churches of purely African origin emerged: the Last Church, commonly called the BaNgemela after its leader Ben Ngemela,³⁶ and the African National Church led by Paddy Nyasulu, which flourished in Ngonde. This church started in 1927.³⁷

The introduction of Christianity succeeded in stamping out some of the Ngonde practices which were regarded to be 'unchristian' by the missionaries, however, complete success was not achieved. Many Christians refrained from some rituals while maintaining belief in others.

However, despite the growth of the Christian Church, the great demand for schools, and the dropping of the old rituals directed to family shades and the heroes, belief in the power of medicines flourishes. Probably most deaths and misfortunes are still attributed to an enemy using either witchcraft or sorcery. The traditional belief in witchcraft is rejected by educated people, but belief in the medicines is general.³⁸

It is important to record that the Scottish missionaries were so impressed with the way Malawians generally welcomed the Christian message that they expected witchcraft to be eradicated. However, to their disappointment, that never happened. Condemnation of belief in the existence of witchcraft did not work. While the missionaries were working hard to

³⁵ Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania 1900-1940*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 1999, p. 63. Fiedler reports that the Nyakyusa were actively encouraged to settle on mission land, but after some time, this policy was abandoned.

³⁶ Wezi Gondwe, *A History of the Last Church of God and His Christ in Malawi from 1916 to 2015*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2015.

³⁷ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 212

³⁸ Ibid.

destroy belief in witchcraft, many Christians in Karonga district were consulting a witch-finder at Wenya.³⁹ The use of protective amulets and charms was widely practiced, even by elders of the church, at Loudon and Elangeni in Mzimba.⁴⁰ This shows that this was a common practice in northern Malawi, if not countrywide. By 1938, at village level, Christianity coexisted with older religious traditions and beliefs. Most Christians remained unconvinced by the church's explanation of misfortune; many turned to alternative explanations when the opportunity presented itself. Hundreds of CCAP communicants between 1959 and 1964 turned to the witchcraft eradicator, Chikanga, himself a member of the Presbyterian Church. The anti-sorcery movement, *Kamchape*, aroused considerable interest among Livingstonia congregations in 1963.⁴¹

Livingstonia Mission had a positive impact on the Ngonde. Today, there are 19 CCAP congregations in Karonga and Ngerenge Presbyteries,⁴² with a membership of over 40,000.⁴³ Even though this is the case, traditional beliefs appear to continue to influence the lives of many Ngonde Christians.

The Coming of African Independent Churches

The Independent churches emerged in the 1920s in northern Malawi and they are considered the "daughters" of Livingstonia Mission. The membership of the first Independent Churches was drawn from the Presbyterian Churches and originally it was made up of those who were suspended from those churches for one reason or the other.⁴⁴ The establishment of such churches reflected their members' rejection of Livingstonia's "Eurocentric code of morality."⁴⁵ One of the churches was the Last Church of God and

³⁹ Livingstonia Presbytery minutes, 26 August 1915.

⁴⁰ John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 329.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 342. For details of Chikanga see Boston Soko, *Nchimi Chikanga: The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008.

⁴² A Presbytery is the second highest court within the Presbyterian structures. It oversees the work of several congregations.

⁴³ Gathered from church records of Karonga and Ngerenge presbyteries.

⁴⁴ John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 321.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 320.

His Christ,⁴⁶ founded by the Tonga Evangelist, Jordan Msumba in 1925.⁴⁷ The church was aimed at defending polygamy and other long established customs.⁴⁸ Monica Wilson interprets the establishment of independent churches as a "structural expression of the conflict between European and African, and the desire of Africans to be independent leaders, but yet be recognized as Christians."⁴⁹

Another church, African National Church, was established in 1927 led by Simon Mkandawire and Paddy Nyasulu. It drew its members from those who were excommunicated from Livingstonia Mission churches for polygamy.⁵⁰ Another church, African Reformed Presbyterian Church, was founded in 1932 by Yaphet Mkandawire, who was suspended after being accused of taking *phemba* medicine as a safeguard against poisoning. The Last Church and the African International Church, an offshoot of the African National Church, are commonly found among the Ngonde. The African International Church was founded in 1928 by Kamkhate Mkandawire and the first centre was at Chitimba in Rumphi district.⁵¹ The church grew rapidly and spread to other parts of the Northern region including Karonga, the home of the Ngonde.

Another church that has an influence in Ungonde area is the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC).⁵² Strictly speaking, AMEC is not an

⁴⁶ For a thorough treatment of the early years of the Last Church, see Owen Kalinga, "Jordan Msumba, Ben Ngemela and the Last Church of God and His Christ," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 13/2, 1982, pp. 207-218; B.J.K. Sikanda, *The Last Church of God and his Christ in Karonga: an Historical Analysis of its Development*, History seminar paper, Chancellor College, Zomba, 1975.

⁴⁷ For the history of the various Last Churches see: Wezi Gondwe, *A History of the Last Church of God and His Christ in Malawi from 1916 to 2015*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2015.

⁴⁸ Resident Chintheche to PC Northern Province, 28 April 1925, MNA NN1/20/3.

⁴⁹ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 172.

⁵⁰ John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 322.

⁵¹ Godwins Lwina, *The Gospel and Culture in Malawi: A Missiological Examination of the Relationship between Ndali Traditions and Christianity (1900-2012)*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2013.

⁵² For the history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Malawi, see Devlin Chirwa, *The History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Malawi: The*

African Independent Church, but it is often seen as related to African Independent Churches or even taken as one. What makes it African is that there is no connection to the Methodist Church in America. Though of American origin, the church was started in Malawi by Malawians. The first church was established by Hannock Msokera Phiri in Kasungu in 1924.⁵³ He established it after being encouraged by Bishop William T. Vernon of the African Methodist Episcopal Church while attaining theological training in South Africa to become a pastor of AMEC. In Karonga, the church was established in 1943 by two Malawians, Simon Mkandawire and Steven Chirambo. It is noteworthy that the initiative to establish this church came from the Malawians themselves. The first converts came from the African National Church.

The first eight converts of Karonga church were former members of the African National Church. It is not surprising that all these eight members were from another African Independent Church. There is a tendency for most newly established independent churches to draw most of their first converts from other independent churches. The motive behind this is not easy to explain. It is possibly one way of seeking spiritual satisfaction or it could also be seeking leadership positions in the newly established church.⁵⁴

The African Methodist Episcopal Church is widely spread among the Ngonde and has influence over many Christians.

The Roman Catholic Church Missions

The Roman Catholics were late comers on the Malawi scene and found the country already divided into spheres of influence by Protestant missions. The first missionaries were the White Fathers⁵⁵ who arrived in Malawi in 1889. They made an attempt to establish the first Roman Catholic Mission

Karonga Branch (1943-2000), Seminar Paper, Department of TRS, University of Malawi, 2002.

⁵³ Devlin Chirwa, *The History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Malawi: The Karonga Branch (1943 – 2000)*, BA, University of Malawi, 2003.

⁵⁴ Devlin Chirwa, *The History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Malawi: The Karonga Branch (1943-2000)*, Seminar Paper, University of Malawi, (TRS) 2002.

⁵⁵ The name was derived from the white dress which the Missionaries of Africa adopted to match the Arab traditional dress. This was done with the hope that it would help in the conversion of Arabs to Christianity. D.D. Phiri, *History of Malawi: From Earliest times to the Year 1915*, Blantyre: CLAIM, 2004. For the history of the White Fathers see J. Bouniol, *The White Fathers and their Missions*, London: Sands and Co, 1929.

at Mponda's in Mangochi, but failed due to political and social reasons. In 1891, they withdrew and went to Bembaland in Zambia to join their friends.⁵⁶ The White Fathers returned to make a second attempt. This time they made a lot of progress because they established several mission stations at Chiwamba in Dowa, Mua in Dedza, Likuni in Lilongwe, Kachebere in Mchinji and Bembeke in Dedza.⁵⁷

The second group of Roman Catholic missionaries, the Montfortians, was sent to the Shire Highlands to do mission work after the White Fathers had left.⁵⁸ The Montfortians established their first mission station at Nzama in Ntcheu District in 1901. They later had a major centre at Nguludi mission.⁵⁹ The second establishment of the Roman Catholic missions eventually led to the opening up of missionary work in the country. The work grew very quickly and spread to other parts of the country.⁶⁰

In the north, the first mission was established at Kayoro in Mabilabo, Mzimba.⁶¹ This was the first Catholic outstation in the northern region of Malawi and it was under Lilongwe Diocese. This was followed by the establishment of Katete parish in 1938, which owes its origin to Igratio Handarson Chirwa, whom the missionaries placed to pioneer the work at Lojwa in Pitara village in Kasungu. Katete became the cathedral of the northern region. Later, the cathedral was transferred to Mzuzu for logistical reasons.⁶² The church spread further north and established many parishes

⁵⁶ See Ian Linden for a vivid account of the first attempt of the White Fathers to establish a mission in Malawi. Ian Linden, *Mponda Mission Diary 1889-1891*, White Fathers, 1989.

⁵⁷ Ian Linden, *Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland 1889-1939*, London: Heinemann, 1974, pp. 13-42.

⁵⁸ Hubert Reijnaerts et al, *Montfortians in Malawi: Their Spirituality and Pastoral Approach*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 1997, p. 35.

⁵⁹ Nguludi is now the home of the Catholic University of Malawi and of the Montfort Special Needs Education College. For the College see: Vita Mumba, *A History of Montfort Special Needs Education College in Educating Specialist Teachers who Support Learners with Hearing Impairments since 1968*, MEd, University of Malawi, 2015.

⁶⁰ John Weller and Jane Linden, *Mainstream Christianity to 1980 in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe*, Gweru: Mambo, 1984, pp. 100-102.

⁶¹ Ndongolera Mwangupili, Ngoni and CCJP Approaches to Reconciliation in Katete Parish, MA, Mzuzu University, 2011.

⁶² Ibid.

in Karonga, with a huge membership. Today, Karonga is a diocese of its own, with a resident bishop.⁶³

Seventh-day Adventists

The Seventh-day Adventist Church owes its origin in Malawi to Joseph Booth.⁶⁴ He established Plainfield Mission station at Makwasa in Southern Thyolo in 1900. This mission was under the umbrella of Seventh-day Baptists (SDB) of Plainfield, New Jersey, USA. Two years later, the mission was sold to the SDA church through the influence of Booth and the name was later changed from Plainfield to Malamulo.⁶⁵ This was followed by the establishment of Matandani Mission in 1907, in response to a request for a school that the people of Chakulemekela village, through Mark Chakachadza, made. Between 1908 and 1950, there was rapid expansion of Adventist evangelical work throughout the country, most of which was done by various African workers. By 1950, the Adventist Church had twelve missions mostly in the southern and northern parts of Malawi.⁶⁶ In the north, the first SDA mission was established at Luwazi, in Tongaland, in 1929 where many Seventh Day Baptists joined.⁶⁷ The next to be established was Lunjika SDA mission in Mzimba.⁶⁸ This station was formerly known as Ntchaya. From Lunjika and other places, the church spread further north, and arrived in Karonga in 1995, at Igchembe, near the Tanzanian border.⁶⁹ But before that, peripheral stations were opened in Karonga between the years 1935-

⁶³ For more information on the development of the Roman Catholic Church in Northern Malawi, see Daniel Kamanga (ed), *Mzuzu Diocese Closes 50. Souvenir Issue*, Rumphi: ADCCOM, 2012.

⁶⁴ For more on the life of Joseph Booth and his contributions, see Harry Langworthy, "Africa for the African." *The Life of Joseph Booth*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 1996. For his background see: Klaus Fiedler, *The Making of a Maverick Missionary. Joseph Booth in Australasia*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008.

⁶⁵ Yonah Matemba, *Matandani: The Second Adventist Mission in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2003, p. 28.

⁶⁶ Jaspin Bilima, *History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Malawi 1900-1980*, MDiv, Andrews University, 1987.

⁶⁷ For its history and development see Amos Bula, *The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Luwazi Mission since its Establishment in 1928 up until 2003*, Mzuni Document, 2012.

⁶⁸ Macleard Banda, "Mission by All to All:" A Study of the History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Lunjika Mission 1932 –1995, MA, University of Malawi, 2006.

⁶⁹ Amos Bula, *The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Luwazi Mission since its establishment in 1928 up until 2003*, Mzuni Document, 2012.

1950. Today, there are many Seventh-day churches in Ungonde with the largest at Karonga Boma.⁷⁰

Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostal churches are an important component of the Church in Karonga. They owe their origin to the Pentecostal revival that began in Azusa Street in the Californian city of Los Angeles in 1906.⁷¹ Within a short period of time, the movement spread to other parts of the world. In 1908 it arrived in South Africa, where it led to the foundation of the Apostolic Faith Mission. Malawian workers in South Africa brought the Apostolic Faith Mission to Malawi.⁷² This church was started in 1933 by Robert Chinguwo. The church was first established in Zomba but later spread to the Lower Shire and other parts of Malawi.

The second Pentecostal Church to be established was the Assemblies of God. It was started in 1934 after Noah Sibale, an itinerant evangelist, was inspired by Assemblies of God missionary in Tanzania, Paul Derr, who had been working there since 1928. Upon returning to Malawi, Sibale influenced the establishment of two centres namely: Mubulu in the Misuku Hills (led by Lyton Kalambule) and Gilbert Village in Dedza (led by Elliot Nkunika). These were established in 1934.⁷³ There are several churches spread out in Ungonde with some of them close to the boma: Karonga Assemblies which opened its doors in 1997, and Mpata Assemblies of God, 2005.⁷⁴

Pentecostal Holiness Association (PHA) started in 1912 as a group of believers, who took their faith seriously, wanted to continue with the new revival that was taking place those days in the USA.⁷⁵ The Church started growing from Bakers Mills to other parts of New York and elsewhere. An evangelist by the name Paul Derr felt called by God to go to Africa to start a Church. God had shown him a vision about going to a village in Tanzania. Originally he was a member of Assemblies of God. When the Assemblies of

⁷⁰ Boma is the district's administrative centre.

⁷¹ Ulf Strohhorn, *Pentecostalism in Malawi: A History of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Malawi, 1931-1994*, Zomba: Kachere, 2005, p. 20.

⁷² Ibid. p. 50.

⁷³ Gregory Mvula and Enson Lwesya, *Flames of Fire: The History of the Assemblies of God in Malawi*, Lilongwe: Assemblies of God in Malawi, 2005, pp. 72-76. See also

N. Warren (ed), *Assemblies of God in Malawi 1947-1972*, Assemblies of God, n.d.

⁷⁴ Int. Pastors Banda (19.3.2012) and Mwamlima (20.3.2012), respectively.

⁷⁵ <http://pentecostalholinessmission.org/about.htm> (27.3.2013).

God refused to send him to Africa as a missionary, he moved to join the Pentecostal Holiness Association (PHA) which supported him to go to Africa to preach. He started his mission work at Igale village in Mbeya Region in Tanzania in 1927. The news of this revival was heard in neighbouring countries, especially Malawi and Zambia which are bordering Mbeya region. It is just a few miles from Igale to the borders. Noah Sibale from Malawi heard about this movement. He visited Igale and was moved by the power of God working among the brethren and by Derr's ministry. He was taken up by this revival and joined PHA. He returned to Malawi and started a PHA church at Kameme-Chitipa in 1932. In 1933 he went to Igale for ordination. In 1935, the Malawi church started a PHA branch in Zambia. In these two countries, the PHA church is still strong and pays respect to the Igale PHA for the firm foundation it laid. There is a congregation at Karonga boma which has a large following.⁷⁶

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi (ELCM),⁷⁷ one of the important classical denominations worldwide, came to Malawi, and especially to Ungonde, not directly from Germany, but from Tanzania. The ELCM was established on 21st November, 1982. The establishment was done by indigenous lay people who became Lutherans as they worked in the neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe, South Africa and Tanzania where Lutheranism had already existed and was fully established. Specifically, the establishment of ELCM is attributed to Gilbert Msuku, who, upon his return to Malawi after seventeen years of residence in Tanzania, where he had been an active member in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT).⁷⁸

It has since grown and has a membership of about one hundred thousand in all of Malawi.⁷⁹ Encouragement came from the Lutheran World Federation and from sister churches in neighbouring Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The

⁷⁶ For the history and practices of Pentecostal Holiness Association in Chitipa see John Sibale, *The History and Characteristics of Pentecostal Holiness Association Churches in Chitipa*, BA, Mzuzu University, 2012.

⁷⁷ For its development in Malawi, see Hilary Mijoga, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi: its Development*, Chancellor College, Zomba, n.d.; and also H.Z. Mwimba, *The Establishing of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi*, BDiv, Makumira Lutheran Theological College, Tanzania, 1992.

⁷⁸ "Mission History - Evangelical Lutheran Church," www.elca.org/who-we-Are/our-three-expressions/churchwide-organisation/Global-Mission/where-we-work/Africa/Malawi/mission-History (29.3.2013).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

major responsibility of nurturing the young church was given to the ELCT, with supportive cooperation from the ELCZ and the Lutheran World Federation. The first temporary church building was constructed in 1983 at Mbidi in southern Malawi. The ELCM is one of the fastest growing churches with many branches among the Ngonde. The first church to be established in Ungonde was Karonga congregation in 1986 and it currently has a membership of 320.⁸⁰

Moravian Church

The Moravian Church originated in Moravia and Bohemia, now known as the Czech Republic. Just like the ELCM, the Moravian Church⁸¹ originated from Tanzania where it had established its centre at Rungwe in 1891 and was brought to Malawi by black missionaries.⁸² The first attempt to establish mission work in Malawi was made by Victor Masangano in 1986 in Thyolo district which was under the auspices of a church in Rungwe Province in Tanzania. The second attempt led to the establishment of a mission at Karonga under the Leadership of Francis Swebe, and another one at Chitipa Boma led by Anangisyo Kalinga in December 2001.⁸³ Karonga is the headquarters of the Moravian Church. It was established in 1987 and has a congregation of 300 members.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Int. Pastor Naboth Fungo, ELCM (Karonga Congregation), 12.3.2012.

⁸¹ For details on Moravian Church, see McBowman Mulagha, *The History of the Moravian Church Mission in Malawi (MCM): 1986-2000*, BA, University of Malawi, 2005. See also Katoto Mtambo, *The Relationship between Livingstonia Synod and the Moravian Church and the Coming of the Moravian Church to Chitipa 1888-2005*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006, for its relationship with Livingstonia Synod.

⁸² Klaus Fiedler, *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania 1900-1940*, Blantyre: CLAIM: Kachere, 1996, p. 147.

⁸³ McBowman Mulagha, *The History of the Moravian Church Mission in Malawi (MCM): 1986-2000*, BA, University of Malawi, 2005.

⁸⁴ Int. Rev. George Kaliati, Karonga Moravian Church, 19.3.2012. See also: Katoto Mtambo, *The Relationship between the Livingstonia Synod and the Moravian Church and the Coming of the Moravian Church to Chitipa 1888-2005*, BA, University of Malawi, 2006.

New Apostolic Church

The New Apostolic Church has its roots in the Restorationist Revival of the first decades of the 19th Century, which sought to restore the primitive church through reestablishing the office of apostles once before the end.⁸⁵

In 1863 the congregation in Hamburg separated from the Apostles of the Catholic Apostolic Church. The reasons were fundamental differences of opinion concerning the role of the Apostle's ministry in the preparation of believers for the return of Christ and on the possibility of completing the number of Apostles that had by then decreased from twelve to six. On 27 January 1863 Friedrich Wilhelm Schwartz, the bishop in charge of the Hamburg congregation, was excommunicated from the Catholic Apostolic Church. This date is considered the birth of the New Apostolic Church. The first suggestion that the New Apostolic Church might spread to overseas was made by Apostle Schwartz. Between 1881 and 1885 missionary work began in Indonesia and Australia, and was extended to North America and South Africa some years later. The church has now spread to all the parts of the world. In Malawi, the first church was established in 1943 by Herbert Kaira at Kafoteka.⁸⁶ The New Apostolic Church (Karonga Central) was established in Karonga in 1954. It has some influence among the Ngonde with a membership of 455 at Karonga boma church.⁸⁷

The Charismatic Movement

The most recent major development that influenced Ungonde was the Charismatic Movement with its roots in the Blantyre revival of the 1970s.⁸⁸ While the Charismatic Movement influenced almost all the denominations in Malawi, one expression of this phenomenon is the rise of interdenominational fellowships and ministries and the many churches born out of these fellowships. In Ungonde, the major Charismatic church is Living

⁸⁵ Klaus Fiedler, "'A Revival Disregarded and Disliked' or What do Seventh-day Adventists, Churches of Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses and the New Apostolic Church have in Common?" in: Klaus Fiedler, *Conflicted Power in Malawian Christianity: Essays Missionary and Evangelical from Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015, pp. 299-322.

⁸⁶ "History of our Church: New Apostolic Church," New Apostolic Church International, www.nak.org/about-the-nac/history-of-our-church (25.3.2012).

⁸⁷ Int. Mcleod Gondwe, Community Evangelist, 14.3.2012.

⁸⁸ For its origins and differentiation from the Pentecostal Movement see Klaus Fiedler, "The Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements in Malawi in Cultural Perspective," *Religion in Malawi*, No. 9, 1999, pp. 27-38.

Waters which was established in 1993.⁸⁹ Other Charismatic churches include Christian Love, Winners Chapel, Christ Embassy, Church on the Wings, and the Kingdom Gospel.

The Charismatic Movement is usually seen as having originated with Dennis Bennett, an Episcopalian minister in California. In Malawi, it started in the 1970s. Interdenominational para-church organizations like Scripture Union, Students' Christian Organization of Malawi (SCOM), and New Life for All provided a conducive environment for its establishment.⁹⁰ Initially, the Charismatic Movement started with interdenominational fellowships which later led to the formation of charismatic churches such as, Faith of God in 1984, Living Waters in 1985, Glad Tidings in 1986, Agape in 1992, All for Jesus in 1993, etc. The fellowships comprised those who called themselves 'born agains.' The fellowships started outside the existing churches, and later some of them developed into separate denominations.⁹¹ In Malawi, the Charismatic movement now comprises more than 5% of Christians, with Living Waters as the largest church among them.⁹² Charismatic churches are now spread across Malawi, and Charismatism has some influence on members of mainline churches as well.⁹³ Among the Ngonde, there is a reasonable representation of Charismatic churches. Although the numbers are still small churches are still growing.

Other Churches

This is an overview of some of the Christian churches among the Ngonde. Other churches that have not been mentioned but do have a presence in Ungonde are Bible Believers, Church of Christ, Zion Christianity Church and Baptist Convention. Rather important among these is the Baptist

⁸⁹ For its origins see Owen Mkandawire, *The Living Waters Church: A Historical, Cultural and Theological Approach (A Study in Christian Growth)*, BA, University of Malawi, 2001; Blessings Mutinti, *The History of Kakule Living Waters Church in Chinsapo*, Lilongwe, BA, Mzuzu University, 2012.

⁹⁰ For a thorough presentation of the Blantyre Revival as the background of the Charismatic Movement, see Bright Kawamba, *Blantyre Spiritual Awakening 1969 to 1986: An Antecedent of the Charismatic Movement in Malawi*, MA, University of Malawi, 2013.

⁹¹ Klaus Fiedler, "The Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements in Malawi in Cultural Perspective," *Religion in Malawi*, No. 9, 1999, pp. 27-38.

⁹² Steven Paas, *The Faith Moves South: A History of the Church in Africa*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006, p. 209.

⁹³ Rhodian Munyenembe, *Christianity and Socio-cultural Issues: the Charismatic Movement and Contextualization in Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2011, p. 34.

Convention which has two churches not far apart at Karonga Boma and several others in rural areas.⁹⁴ Baptist missions owe their origin to the Great Evangelical Awakening, which is commonly dated to the revival of Jonathan Edwards in 1734 in the American colonies. Among the results of the Great Awakening was the multiplication of Baptist churches. The Baptists took evangelism very seriously.⁹⁵ In Malawi, Joseph Booth is considered the first Baptist missionary.⁹⁶ The Baptist Convention came to Malawi largely under the influence of Southern Baptist missionaries from America, as an extension of their work in Zimbabwe and Zambia. The first Southern Baptist Missionaries (SBM) came to Malawi in 1959.⁹⁷ In that year, Baptist work was established in southern Malawi by Bill and Blanche Wester, LeRoy and Jean Albright.⁹⁸ The church then spread to all parts of Malawi.

BACOMA first came to the north in 1971, especially to Mzuzu under the leadership of Njolomole and Elizabeth Phiri. Mzuzu became the main station in the northern region. The Baptist church was introduced to Karonga in the same year by Njolomole Phiri and Swafford. They held an evangelistic meeting and those who were converted became the pillars of Karonga Baptist Church. Several churches have been established in Karonga since then.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ For the history of the Baptist Convention of Malawi see Hany Longwe, *Christians by Grace – Baptists by Choice: A History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2011.

⁹⁵ The first Baptist foreign missionary was William Carey, who published in 1792 his *Inquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792, which can be considered as the programmatic text of the Modern Missionary Movement.

⁹⁶ Hany Longwe, *Christians by Grace – Baptists by Choice: A History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2011, p. 29. – Joseph Booth was indeed a Baptist, but came to Malawi in 1892 as an interdenominational missionary. In 1900 he started the first lasting Baptist denomination in Malawi, the Seventh Day Baptists.

⁹⁷ Judy Garner, *History of the Baptist Mission in Malawi: A Rambling Remembrance of some People and Events in the History of the Baptist Mission in Malawi*. Lilongwe: Baptist Publications, 1998, p. iii.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹⁹ Hany Longwe, *Christians by Grace – Baptists by Choice: A History of the Baptist Convention of Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2011, p. 82.

A smaller church related to but different from the Baptists is the Churches of Christ¹⁰⁰ which has a small congregation in Karonga.¹⁰¹ This is one of the restorationist churches which aim at restoring the original Christianity of the New Testament in faith and practice.¹⁰² This church reached Malawi in 1906 but only came to Karonga in the 1960s.¹⁰³

Though not widely spread, the Zionists are also represented in Ungonde by the Zion Christianity Church (ZCC).¹⁰⁴ This church originated from South Africa¹⁰⁵ but reached Ungonde only in 1994.¹⁰⁶ This is a church of healing and preaching, and the pastor/prophet depends on the spirit of God to do these. The church has influence among the Ngonde and the boma church has a membership of over 700.¹⁰⁷

The Bible Believers do not consider themselves to be a church, although in many respects they are.¹⁰⁸ The Bible Believers are represented by many centres, some of which include Karonga Boma, which started in 1980 and Ngerenge which was established around the same time. The centres are currently having small numbers.

Commonalities between ATR and Christianity among the Ngonde

Many studies have been carried out on the relationship between African Traditional Religion and Christianity and the points of contact between the

¹⁰⁰ For its origins see Mark Thiesen, "The Beginnings of Churches of Christ in Malawi," *Religion in Malawi*, vol 16 (2011), pp. 20-27. For the origin of the Churches of Christ in the north of Malawi see Ann Thiesen, *The Warm Heart of Africa*, Winona: J.C. Choate, 1998.

¹⁰¹ The church at the Boma had a membership of 230 at the time of my field research.

¹⁰² Mark Thiesen, "The Beginnings of Churches of Christ in Malawi," *Religion in Malawi*, vol 16 (2011), pp. 20-27.

¹⁰³ Int. Preacher Simkonda, Karonga Church of Christ, 14.3.2012.

¹⁰⁴ The emphasis is on a Zionist church with "a star" as its singlet. This church differentiates itself from the others in this manner.

¹⁰⁵ For its history see Ulf Strohbahn, *The Christian Zionism in Malawi History – Theology – Anthropology*, PhD, University of Malawi, 2010 (Published as: Ulf Strohbahn, *The Zionist Churches of Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Int. Pastor/Prophet Shout Tiyezege Mwandepeka, Zion Christianity Church, 19.3.2012.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ For a comprehensive study of the Bible Believers, see Richard Gadama, *The Bible Believers in Malawi: History, Teachings and Practices (1977-2011)*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2012.

two. One study looked at *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*,¹⁰⁹ which argues that African Traditional Religion has positive elements that act as a basis for an easier understanding of the Christian faith leading to acceptance of it. Kauta Msiska also argues that while certain elements of African Traditional Religion do not really need to be retained by Christians, some are helpful in living out the Christian life. He maintains that there is need on the part of those who preach the gospel to understand this so that they do not require that all the beliefs and customs be thrown away as this has led to the loss of, even good things in the process. This includes those elements which are important for the teaching of the Christian faith.¹¹⁰

There are some shared elements between Christianity and African Traditional Religion among the Ngonde. The traditional religious beliefs of the Ngonde comprise several elements. There is belief in the supreme God and in spirits (ancestral spirits and other spirits). There is also belief in medicines, that is, in a mystical power residing in certain material substances, which are used by those who have the required knowledge. In addition, there is lively belief in witchcraft, that is, those with powers or knowledge to manipulate the powers to harm others. Further, there is belief in life after death. ATR also has its specialists who perform the necessary rituals. A moral conduct "text" to guide the individual and community life of the Ngonde is present in form of taboos, proverbs and other teachings.

Belief in God

Belief in the Supreme Being is an ancient phenomenon among the Ngonde, and was there before the coming of Christianity.¹¹¹ Duncan Mackenzie records that the Ngonde believed in the Supreme Being prior to the coming of the white man and the teachings of Christianity. This was evidenced by the several references that the Ngonde made to God in their language. In

¹⁰⁹ Dolb Mwakanandi, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*, PhD, University of Stellenbosch, 1990.

¹¹⁰ Steven Kauta Msiska, *Golden Buttons: Christianity and Traditional Religion among the Tumbuka*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006.

¹¹¹ Idolatry is unknown amongst many African tribes. Ancestors are not gods, and Africans make a clear distinction between God and ancestors. *Africa's Way to Life: Lessons for Adult Catechumens Lessons 1-12*, Transvaal: Department of Education and Catechists of South African Catholic Bishop's Conference, 1963, p. 43.

addition, prayers and sacrifices were offered to God.¹¹² All people had to prostrate themselves before him. Monica Wilson made the observation in the 1950s that in Ngonde conversations, the name *Kyala* featured highly in various contexts.¹¹³ The name commonly used for God in Kyangonde was *Kyala*. This name is still used today in ATR as well as in Christianity. Further, these two religions share some concepts about God. For instance, the names that are given to God in ATR, that reflect his attributes, are also present in Christianity. For instance there are attributes such as creator and sustainer, father, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, holy, ruler, and almighty. The idea that humans cannot directly know God is also shared. The difference is that in ATR God seems to be very distant from people and cannot be easily approached by the living. God created the world and after that he withdrew from direct contact with human beings. This is why prayers are sometimes directly addressed to the ancestral spirits, who in many cases are conceived as having power themselves to grant a petition; but more frequently they are requested to carry the petitions to God, who alone can give what is asked for. The Ngonde believe that God is supreme over men and spirits and over the forces of nature as these are understood. Christians believe that God is accessible at any time by anyone through Jesus Christ. God is seen as creator of humans and all living things just like in ATR, but it is debatable whether *Kyala* in ATR is the same as the *Kyala* of Christians. There are some Christians who argue that *Kyala* in ATR is not the God of the Bible.¹¹⁴ The Kyangonde Bible uses the traditional name *Kyala* for God.

Spirits

The Ngonde belief in spirits has been discussed in detail in chapter one of this study. The subject is here discussed for the sake of comparison between this belief and that commonly found in Christianity. There is belief in the existence of spirits in both ATR and Christianity. The pre-Christian Ngonde believed in the existence of ancestral spirits as well as other spirits

¹¹² Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 178.

¹¹³ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 157-159.

¹¹⁴ I pointed out in chapter one that *Kyala* was the name given to one of the heroes, separate from any hero or ancestor, in Ngonde cosmology, during the pre-Christian era. Today, *Kyala* is the name that is used to refer to the Christian God. Even in ATR thinking among the Ngonde, *Kyala* is God.

known as *mapiri*.¹¹⁵ Since God was seen as too awesome to be directly involved in the everyday affairs of men, it was possible to approach him through an intermediary spirit who, it was believed, took the physical form of a snake. The main residence of this snake was the area that includes Kambwe forest and the nearby pool, Chibondo in southern Ungonde; and Filagule Hill, which is part of the highlands which form the western borders of the Karonga plain.

In addition to belief in these spirits, there is also a strong belief in ancestral spirits. Spirits are directly engaged in the lives of human beings, and can act as intermediaries between God and humans. Christians also believe in the existence of spirits, except that these spirits are referred to as evil spirits or demons and they are enemies of Christianity because they are always associated with evil. Prayers are held to ward off these spirits because they are agents of evil. In ATR, the adherents seek their help although the spirits can sometimes be angry and bring harm when offended. Of course, perpetual association with them is not always good and sometimes rituals are held to drive them away. In ATR the adherents differentiate between good and evil spirits. Good spirits provide protection against harm, misfortune and disease, heal illness and provide children, rain for crops, fish and wild game, and protection for livestock. Some spirits are viewed as evil and are believed to be responsible for illness, premature death and other forms of suffering and misfortune.

Belief in Life after Death

There is shared belief in life after death in both Christianity and ATR. In ATR, it is believed that the deceased are still part of the community of the living, especially of the families to which they formerly belonged. From time to time they return to visit and enjoy meals with their family members. This is why, when one is eating food, especially the staple food, and some is dropped, she is encouraged not to pick it up because that is the share of the spirits; they have eaten it. The Ngonde still believe this even when they pick up the fallen food and throw it away after the meal. The spirits are unseen guests at every meal and may cause one to drop food in order for them to eat. They also possess the power to punish those who violate some of the traditions which need to be adhered to. In Christianity, it is believed that there is life after death, but the separation of the dead and the living is emphasized. There is no communication between the living and the dead.

¹¹⁵ Dolb Mwakanandi, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of the Christian Faith in Malawi*, PhD, University of Stellenbosch, 1990, p. 34.

Religious Leaders

Just like in Christianity, there are leaders in ATR who perform specific religious tasks and duties. In Christianity there are religious positions which include pastors, evangelists, priests and prophets; while in ATR there are positions which include priests, rain-makers and healers (diviners, herbalists and spirit mediums).¹¹⁶ All these do fulfill their roles to meet the needs of the society. Although there are some commonalities between Christianity and ATR, the way people are called into these roles is very different. The way these "officials" perform their roles is also different, especially with regard to the source of their authority. For example, priests are common to both ATR and Christianity and may appear to be performing a similar role—officiate at religious ceremonies and rituals. However, the objective and source of their authority are different. Christians get their authority from God through Jesus Christ, while the ATR adherents might claim to get it from spirits or long dead ancestors. It is noteworthy that traditional priests are still found in some parts of Africa. Where they are found, people have temples and cults associated with major spirits (or divinities).¹¹⁷ Where there are no priests, the tasks are performed by ritual elders. Priests do not work on full time basis in ATR; their work appears to be occasional, while in Christianity priests work full time. Probably the difference may come in where the priesthood in ATR belongs to a particular family. When one dies, another one of the same family takes over. No person who is not a close family member can take over the priesthood.

Observance of Taboos

There is observance of taboos in both Christianity and ATR.¹¹⁸ There are certain things which are forbidden among the Ngonde which are called *Mwiko*. Such things are banned because they are perceived to be disgraceful, wicked, improper or inconvenient. In African Traditional Religion, people observe the taboos because they were passed down to them from their parents and grandparents. The Ngonde can hardly explain the reasons behind some of the taboos. Of course, some have to do with angering ancestral spirits. These were essential for moral guidance and social order in society. Similarly, Christians have certain things which they are not allowed

¹¹⁶ Richard Chowning <http://religionAfrica.com/2011/03/difference-between-african-traditional-religion-and-Christianity> (23.10.2011).

¹¹⁷ John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1975, p. 161.

¹¹⁸ He defines a taboo as something which is prohibited. See *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 95.

to do, called sin. The difference is that Christians have the scriptures that give them guidelines on what to do and what not to do. In addition, the reasons for not doing certain things are clear.

Occasions on which Christians Participate in ATR

During my field research, I very much wanted to interview Ngonde people who did not belong to any religious grouping. I did not find one.¹¹⁹ All people claimed to belong to a particular religion although they did not participate in the activities of that religion regularly. Some Christians had not gone to church for two years but still claimed that they were Christians and members of a particular church. Even those who did not go to church were not typical traditionalists but had a Christian background to refer to while they had been growing up. These included diviners/traditional healers. For example, among the diviners/traditional healers that I interviewed, some claimed to belong to the Roman Catholic Church, or Seventh-day Adventist, or Last Church, or African International Church or Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, even though they no longer attended church services in those denominations. One indicated that she does not attend church services but sends her financial contribution every month.¹²⁰ On a social level, everyone professes to be a Christian, but theologically, not all qualify to be Christians.

Many Ngonde Christians are participating in elements of African Traditional Religions in various ways. First, it is through the consultation of traditional healers, especially the *nchimi* (diviner). A *nchimi* is consulted for various reasons: during illness, when individuals are troubled by witches, when they want to be 'searched' so that they can know about their life and those of their loved ones, to inquire about lost goods, animals or people, to get protective medicine, to get reproductive medicine, to get medicine to bewitch others (*nyanga*), to get prosperity medicines, or when ancestors

¹¹⁹ Christianity is the main religion in Karonga district, which is home to the Ngonde. According to the 2008 population census, 95.5% of the people are Christians, 2% are Muslims, and the remaining 1.9% practise other forms of religious beliefs, and 0.6% were recorded as having no religion. This shows that there are very few people who practice other forms of religious beliefs which may include African Traditional Religion. The main Christian denominations in Karonga are Seventh-day Adventist, Roman Catholic, CCAP, Anglican, New Apostolic Faith, Living Waters, Assemblies of God and Jehovah's Witnesses. *Karonga District Socio-Economic Profile 2009-2011*, p. 22.

¹²⁰ Int. Sekani Nyandovi, Gwebwe Village, 18.12.2010.

seem to be haunting them. Consultation is also done with a *nchimi* to find out who bewitched them, as well as to get the village cleansed of witches, especially if the village leaders feel that there is too much witchcraft in the village. Apart from seeking the services of a *nchimi*, many Christians also participate in rituals associated with pregnancy and birth, funerals, rain-making, and chieftaincy, which are mostly religious. Further, many Christians also hold certain traditional religious beliefs. These influence the way they behave and live their lives.¹²¹ The beliefs include those that are associated with ancestral veneration.

Consultation of Nchimi

Many Ngonde Christians practise dual religiosity although some may not be aware of it. The level of involvement varies from one person to another. This involvement is manifested through traditional healing which is connected in some way to belief in witchcraft. Traditional healing is performed in different ways and by various practitioners, some of whom are *nchimi*. Although this study is not about how *nchimi* perform their work but the use that Christians make of them, clearly some of the procedures that the *nchimi* follow when dealing with illnesses that are brought to them, do justify the label 'dual religious' as the process almost equally engages the two religious systems.

Since administration of traditional healing falls into different categories, a certain category of traditional healers is exempted from this description.¹²² It is therefore essential for me to use Marlise Richter's description to demonstrate the differences between the two categories. Some traditional healers are called herbalists (commonly known as *ng'anga* or *mughanga*

¹²¹ Some Christians, for example, will avoid sweeping at night because they are sweeping the spirits away. Christians do various things which result from their fear of witchcraft.

¹²² It may be argued that traditional healing is an element of African Traditional Religions, and therefore there shouldn't be any exemption. However, differentiation is necessary because some traditional healing does not have any spiritual elements attached, and it is administered just like bio-medical healing is. Traditional medicine, just like bio-medicine, is administered by special people, except in cases where the illness is not serious. For example, people use medicine (such as Aspirin) that they buy over the counter when they have simple ailments like headaches, stomachaches, etc, in the same way people use traditional medicine that they obtain from herbs based on the knowledge they have from elders and others. The only difference is that it is 'traditional' as opposed to scientific.

among the Ngonde).¹²³ "Diviners are different from traditional healers in that they provide diagnosis usually through spiritual means while the herbalist simply chooses and applies relevant remedies."¹²⁴ Diviners generally look towards the 'spiritual' origin such as witchcraft and displeasure by ancestors in order to cure an illness. Divination is done through the use of divination objects, being possessed by spirits, and other means. Ancestral spirits are an essential aid in many divining processes. The ancestral spirits are believed to reveal the client's illness and general condition.

Divination links together, in its own way, the physical and the spiritual worlds, making it a religious activity. The diviner fulfils an intermediary function between the physical and the psychical, between the human and the spiritual, for the sake of his own community.¹²⁵

Andrew Walls agrees that there is a distinction between traditional medicine and western medicine with the former belonging to the spiritual (religious or magical) world, and the latter belonging to the secular world:

Traditional medicine has certainly used herbal remedies, but a traditional healer needs more than knowledge of the pharmacopoeia. He must have a deep knowledge of human nature, the ability to ask probing question, not to speak of his religious or magical expertise. Western medicine, in contrast, belongs firmly to the secular world. We have built our medical practice on the principle of treating the person.¹²⁶

It is widely believed among the Ngonde that the *nchimi*/diviners have more healing powers than the herbalists have because the diviners have access to the ancestors and communicate with them. This is the case because in Ngonde hierarchy ancestors are closer to God than they are.¹²⁷ Ngonde Christians at many times seek the services of a *nchimi* in the event of

¹²³ Sometimes the Ngonde do use a blanket term (*ng'anga*) to refer to both herbalists and diviners. In very rare cases do they refer to a traditional healer as *nchimi*. Listening to some conversations, one will hear something like this "*ng'anga yochima*" (a traditional healer that performs divination).

¹²⁴ Marlise Richter, Traditional Healers in South Africa, a discussion paper prepared for the Treatment Action Campaign and AIDS Law Project, 27th November, 2003.

¹²⁵ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1970, p. 233.

¹²⁶ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, London: T & T Clark, 2004, p. 98.

¹²⁷ Int. Gilford Mwamatope (TA Karonga), Mwamatope Village, 20.11.2010.

sudden or protracted illness, illness that cannot be treated bio-medically, when it seems it is the only option available, when they are pressed by relatives, when they believe that they are bewitched, when they want to be 'searched' (*kusecheka*),¹²⁸ or to get protective medicine, reproductive medicine, prosperity medicines, when they are troubled by witches, when they want to get medicine to bewitch others, when they are haunted by ancestors, and for many other reasons.

Sudden or Protracted Illness

It was pointed out in chapter two that when certain illnesses strike, the Ngonde often suspect that someone has bewitched them (*bulosi bo buli pankanyi*) and they would in most cases visit a traditional healer rather than seek bio-medical attention.¹²⁹ This, of course, is not true for all illnesses; it depends on the type of illness. Today, if one is having general body pains, they suspect malaria, and therefore seek medical attention first. However, pneumonia (*chilaso*) is never considered a natural illness, witchcraft is always suspected,¹³⁰ although they may sometimes go to seek bio-medical help just to see if it will work, and if it does not then they will seek help from traditional healers. One of the reasons many Christians gave for visiting traditional healers was protracted illness. If one falls ill and the sickness persists for a long time even after seeking bio-medical help, one has no option but either to use traditional medicine¹³¹ or to go to a traditional healer. While a few have knowledge of traditional medicines that can heal certain illnesses and can therefore treat themselves, many have to seek the services of a traditional healer. It is believed among the Ngonde that natural illness is the one that yields to bio-medical treatment or tradi-

¹²⁸ "To be searched" is an exercise done by a diviner where he is able to see into one's body and tell him what his problem is. He can foretell the future and explain what happened in the past. The diviner can tell a client a whole lot of things pertaining to various aspects of the client's life. The same phrase may also be used to refer to a situation where a diviner searches for charms (*nyanga*) from those practicing witchcraft.

¹²⁹ This is not to say that medical treatment is Christian and traditional medicine unchristian. Medical treatment boasts of scientific research and is therefore regarded as superior compared to traditional medicine.

¹³⁰ Int. Eliam Kasunga, Mwenitete Village, 28.3.2011.

¹³¹ As pointed out earlier in the study, the Ngonde have a wide knowledge of traditional medicines. For details of medicines and the type of illnesses they are used for see Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *Spirit Ridden Konde*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1925.

tional treatment, and healing is expected to take place immediately or a few days after treatment. There is a common belief that protracted illness must be taken to a traditional healer. When telling their stories, many would first say "*Nkhabuka kuchipatala, madokotala wakagera mikota yabo, yatoliwa, po twabukire nayo ku mughanga*"¹³² (I went to the hospital and the doctors tried their medicines, but they did not work, so I went to a traditional healer).

The protracted illness is sometimes used as an excuse even when their heart was already set on visiting the traditional healer's place. This is demonstrated when people go to the hospital and to a *nchimi* concurrently to get treatment. It is noteworthy that some clinical personnel do recommend that some illnesses be taken to traditional healers because the illness cannot be treated bio-medically.¹³³ Sometimes those who take care of the patients get the silent message that the clinical officers give by discharging from hospital someone who is not fully recovered—a patient who still looks very ill. The message they get is that they have failed and therefore can try other means to have the patient healed, or, they should take the patient home and just wait for his death. However, the irony I noted was that although Christians take their illnesses to *nchimi*, a big percentage of those who die, die in hospital. One respondent commented that it is scandalous for a Christian to die at a *ng'anga's* compound, so relatives make sure that patients are taken to hospital or home when the illnesses get very serious so that they do not die there.¹³⁴ Below are some of the case studies¹³⁵ of those who were ill and were taken to hospitals and then, after protracted illness, taken to a traditional healer, in some cases

¹³² *Mughanga* is a Ngonde name for traditional healer and sometimes when people say *mughanga* they could be referring to a diviner as well, even though a diviner is known by a different term, *nchimi*.

¹³³ This includes illness such as *fimbuza*, swelling of the stomach and others. In some cases, the medical personnel declare that they are unable to trace what could be wrong with a patient, even after doing several tests.

¹³⁴ Int. Alefa Nyakawonga, Gwebu Village, 18.12.2010. However, there could be other reasons, like that the traditional healers are also keen not to have people die at their places. A lady from the north, diagnosed with incurable cancer, was admitted to Gloria Jeremiah's Herbal Hospital in the Zomba area. She continued to deteriorate, and after weeks, a few days before her death, she was sent to Zomba Central Hospital "for further treatment" (Klaus Fiedler, *Fake Healing Claims for HIV and AIDS: Traditional, Christian and Scientific*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2016).

¹³⁵ Names of people involved in these case studies have been concealed. The ones used are not their real names.

against their will. For some, the sickness was sudden and probably started mysteriously.

Case 1: Patrick, a Medical Assistant at one of the Health Centres in Karonga, and a strong¹³⁶ Christian of the New Apostolic Church, fell ill in 2010 and asked the nurse to treat him for malaria. However, after taking the treatment for three days there was no relief. After some time, he decided to go to Karonga District Hospital where he was tested for malaria but the results were negative. Despite this finding he took malarial treatment for a second time. In the course of treatment he developed diarrhoea and was given some drugs to stop it.

Since the illness prolonged, so many stories came out. Some were saying that he had been bewitched because he was favouring some people and not others when assisting patients. It was alleged that some decided to "deal" with him (bewitch him) for that reason. His mother, his brother and other members of the family discussed the issue and decided to take Patrick to a *nchimi*. Patrick, though a medical assistant himself, started believing the stories he was hearing and was filled with fear that he might die. He agreed to seek help from a *nchimi*. He was taken by his brother, also a committed Christian of the New Apostolic Church, to a *nchimi*. They were accompanied by one staff member from the clinic. The *nchimi* did his divination and found that people, under the influence of *malafyale* (chiefs), had put a bell in his stomach which was causing the illness. The *nchimi* decided to keep him for some days until he got well. But news reached the District Health Officer (DHO) who went to collect Patrick from the *nchimi's* compound where he had been admitted for a day. The DHO was afraid Patrick might die at the *nchimi's* place and the issue would be complicated—how would he explain it to the authorities? He was taken to the district hospital where he was diagnosed with sepsis and admitted for two days. While at the hospital the brother continued to give him traditional medicine from the diviner, in his tea. One strange thing happened in hospital, his file went missing for two days! Was it the power of witchcraft? He asked himself. Many of his relatives interpreted the missing of his file as evidence that his illness was the work of witchcraft and magic was used in the missing of the file. He finally got well. His relatives

¹³⁶ A strong member is the one who has fulfilled the requirements of the church, attends worship services regularly, gives money to the church and participates in many of the church programmes. I did not verify with the church leaders about how strong or weak a Christian was, I just believed their word.

advised him to move out of the area where he worked for fear that he might die.

It is not always the case that people rush to the traditional doctor when they suspect an illness such as malaria. They normally seek bio-medical attention, but when the illness persists, they turn to traditional healing. In the above case, Patrick and his family members did not wait long enough to see the effects of the malarial medicine that he was given, which demonstrates that they were already suspicious that he was bewitched as we shall see later. This fear was further confirmed by the missing of his file when he was admitted to the hospital. The issue here is that people will seek bio-medical attention when they think that the illness is natural, thus, from God. However, if the illness prolongs, it becomes unnatural (witchcraft is suspected) and therefore they turn to traditional therapy. When illness prolongs, fear creeps in and something must be done quickly to counter any witchcraft attacks. From Patrick's story above, it is not only the family that suspects that he is bewitched, but also the community around, perhaps because he is a public figure, a Medical Assistant.¹³⁷

The reason for his bewitchment suggests that one can be bewitched because of his (assumed) moral conduct. In Patrick's case, favouritism when discharging his duties was the cause for his bewitchment. In this way, witchcraft is used as a moral watchdog, restraining people from engaging in bad conduct. Witchcraft can be used to do anything, including placing a bell in somebody's stomach as the diviner found out. Patrick was moving with a bell in his stomach which was causing the illness. I asked him if he could feel the weight of the bell in his belly and he said no. The bell was imaginary, but very real to the sufferer. It is also interesting to see that while Patrick was admitted to hospital, his brother continued to give him traditional medicine in his tea. Both medicines had to be deployed because of the strong belief they had in the cause of the illness. One would expect a Medical Assistant, who has adequate knowledge of bio-medical medicine, and possessing enough education, not to tolerate what he went through.

From Patrick's story, it can be gathered that he (together with his brother) is participating in dual religiosity, being a Christian and then believing in witchcraft and seeking help from a diviner who uses powers from ancestors to diagnose and deal with illnesses. Patrick and his family, who profess to

¹³⁷ Normally witchcraft only works (traditionally) with relatives. However, witchcraft can also be applied against non-relatives, especially if it involves a wider community where a village headman is involved.

be active Christians of the New Apostolic Church, portray allegiance to elements of African Traditional Religion. However, Patrick does not see any conflict about his seeking help from a diviner because he said, "traditional healers and hospitals are partners in dealing with health issues." He also said that New Apostolic Church does not have any rules against consulting *nchimi*; members are at liberty to do as they wish when sick.¹³⁸ Patrick stated that this was not the first time he had an encounter with a *nchimi* due to protracted illness. It is very likely that he will consult *nchimi* again should a similar situation arise in future. It follows then that members consult traditional healers, including *nchimi*, due to a life threatening crisis and lack of teaching from their churches.

Case 2: While Chankhulu was staying with his cousin in Mwazisi in the year 2000, one night he fell ill. While he was sleeping, he felt a very painful pricking in one of his toes and suspected that it was *chilaso*.¹³⁹ He could hardly sleep. He endured the pain all night and for a number of days. He thought that the pain would go away by itself but it did not. When the pain persisted, he and his brother decided to consult a traditional healer because of the way the illness had started. They were told that Chankhulu stepped on a charm that was meant to harm him. As the traditional healer was making some incisions to apply powdered medicine, dark blood came out and this was taken as confirmation that indeed he had been bewitched.¹⁴⁰ This was not the only *ng'anga* he went to; he went from one to another, because he could not find healing. When they moved from Mwazisi to Mkombezi, the situation got worse. He now had pains in the leg and arm and sat for national examinations with a lot of difficulty. He then decided to visit a *nchimi* who used a stone-like object during divination. He was told that he had been bewitched by a neighbour in the village (not at Mkombezi) whose house was facing the lake. Chankhulu knew quite well that he did not have such a neighbour but he could not say so to a

¹³⁸ However, an interview with one of the church leaders, McLeod Gondwe, Community Evangelist, showed that members are encouraged to believe in God, not in traditions. He further stated that the New Apostolic Church does not have any problems with people consulting traditional healers as long as they are not *nchimi* (diviners).

¹³⁹ *Chilaso* appears to be a generic term that is used for illnesses that begin as a result of witchcraft, especially those that have a pricking effect on the body. It is much more than what we call pneumonia in English.

¹⁴⁰ Scientifically, blood turns black when it comes into contact with carbon dioxide.

diviner.¹⁴¹ He was given some bitter herbs and was told to massage on the part that was painful with it, but again it did not work. The pain persisted. He later on visited another healer at Nyungwe who told him that through magic, he would send the illness back to the one who caused it (*lupe-mbe*).¹⁴² He was then instructed to bring *nkhokoloko*, a type of fish and a needle to the *nchimi*. The *nchimi* mixed the two with traditional medicines, and gave them to him and was told to throw them into a running river and not to look back. The river would carry them away and the illness would go away. After he did this, there was some improvement. There was no mention at any point that they went to the hospital, because of the manner in which the illness started.

Originally Chankhulu was a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA). He then joined Pentecostal Assemblies in 2003 after being persuaded by his father. The father told him that it was not good for him to seek help from a *ng'anga* and again he was the only member of the family belonging to SDA.¹⁴³ After prayers, fasting and overnight prayers that stretched over a period of one month, he claims that he was totally healed. This happened in 2005. This experience led to conversion, giving his life to Christ.

However, in 2010, the problem recurred. He suspects that the leg problem started after inheriting a shop from a certain Tanzanian friend in 2009 after the Malawian President ordered that all Tanzanians who were in Malawi illegally should go back to their country. That particular Tanzanian was quite advanced in traditional medicines (*wamikota*). When Chankhulu occupied the business premises he found traditional medicine in several places in the shop. Different kinds of medicines were found: some in bottles and looked like snakes, herbs, charms, wood and roots. He also found the bile of crocodile in bottles, a very dangerous substance, believed to be used to bewitch people. It is also known as *sumu*. A friend warned Chankhulu not to touch the bottles; they were protecting the Tanzanian's shop from those who steal money and things in magic, and were dangerous. He used to come to collect them one by one but he died before he could finish remo-

¹⁴¹ It is not expected for a client to dispute anything that a diviner says for fear of the consequences. Diviners can do something harmful to anyone who challenges or undermines their powers and profession. Offending them is costly.

¹⁴² This *lupe-mbe* affects the one who caused the illness.

¹⁴³ It must be noted that SDA teaches against consulting *ng'anga*. See "'Seventh-day Adventists Believe'—An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," n.p. Pacific Press, 2005. When Chankhulu was consulting *ng'anga*, he did that on his own accord.

ving his stuff. At the time of interview, there was still one bottle remaining in the shop. Chankhulu thinks that the charms were a loophole the demons used to enter the leg and that is why the pains were back again.¹⁴⁴

In the story above, Chankhulu underrated the illness that started unexpectedly in the middle of the night although he suspected that he might have been bewitched. He waited for a few days to be sure that the pain was real. An illness that started with pricking turned out to be something that would stick with him for years. When the illness persisted, his brother took him to a *nchimi* who confirmed that he stepped on some charms which hurt him. They moved from one *nchimi* to another, not only to seek another doctor's opinion, but also to visit the most powerful doctor—an expert in *vilaso*. It can also be noted from one of the treatments that illness can be washed away in a river. In addition, the *nchimi* sent back the illness to the one who caused it through magic, although there is no evidence that it reached the one who caused it, because Chankhulu continued to suffer. Throwing things in running water meant ridding oneself of the illness. Protracted and sudden illness was a good enough reason to send him to traditional healers.

It can be noted further that Chankhulu's conversion was motivated by his (temporary) healing. As a born again Christian, he regrets that he believed the lie of Satan by visiting different *nchimi* to seek healing. He lamented on how ignorance can mislead someone and quoted a verse from the New Testament to explain what was happening, namely that in the time of ignorance God overlooks certain things (Acts 17:30). As a SDA Christian he was not supposed to make those visits but prolonged illness made him do it. He is happy that now he is delivered from all the demons that got into his body through all the visits he made to *nchimi*.

The owner of the shop is dead but Chankhulu was still keeping the charms. When I asked him why he was still keeping them, he said that they were dangerous and the owner told him not to touch them when he was alive. In addition he was uncomfortable to get in contact with the demons. One of the options he had was to request a diviner to take them out for him, but he was not willing to do that for fear of inviting demons to his shop. I also asked him why he could not request the pastor or friends from his church to pray and remove them, because I hear of pastors who pray, touch and

¹⁴⁴ In Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, it is widely believed that demons can have access into somebody's body or life through objects which are considered to be connected to the demonic world.

burn 'dangerous' charms. He did not want to do that for fear that his pastor and church people would come to know that he had been keeping the charms for two years then; they would lose trust in him. The fact that he had not removed some of the traditional medicines and charms from the shop shows that he still believed that they were protecting the shop although he claimed that they were demonic. It is possible that he was afraid that his business might crumble if he removed them. This could be described as a case of reluctant but real dual religiosity. The fact that Chankhulu was born again did not stop him from trusting in powers other than God's.

Case 3: Lorraine, a member of Assemblies of God Church, shared the story of her illness as follows. Her legs were swollen and she could hardly walk. She was taken to the hospital and was given injections because she was suspected of having elephantiasis. The injections did not work. The illness continued for a long time. Her parents then decided to take her to a woman *nchimi* for treatment because they suspected that their daughter had been bewitched. After discovering the cause of the illness by consulting the spirits, the *nchimi* took her to the rice schemes, made some incisions on her legs and washed them with running water to get rid of the 'bad blood' from her legs. She came back but there was no improvement. Her healing came after she was prayed for.

Lorraine's sickness made her navigate between the hospital, the *ng'anga* and faith healing. Again, protracted illness caused her parents to take her to a traditional healer who felt that bad blood was causing her legs to swell and needed to be drained out of the body. Water is symbolically used to wash away bad things from the body. Running water had to be used to wash her legs. In Chankhulu's case above, he had to throw some items into running water and not look back for him to be free from the illness. Her mother is a committed CCAP Christian and at the time she was taken to the *nchimi*, Lorraine was a CCAP member. Her mother is not "born again" and still believes in traditional healing, but Lorraine, following her faith healing, is now "born again" and a committed member of Karonga Assemblies of God.

Case 4: Atanazio and Getrude, his wife, are faithful and committed Roman Catholics. The names they have were given to them at baptism. Atanazio has dark and swollen legs. He can hardly walk and spends most of his time sitting or lying down. His first visit to the hospital showed that he has cancer. He has been to hospitals in Karonga and Blantyre but found no healing, and medical personnel informed him that there is no cure for his

illness; he can only be given medication that relieves him of pain. After a year of suffering, his family decided to try traditional healers and has so far been to more than ten of them. There is no improvement. Now he is just taking medical treatment to relieve pain, and the hospital personnel told him that he has to live with it. Asked as to whether he thinks that he was bewitched, Atanazio just laughed it off. I pressured him to answer that question but he just laughed. I did not know how to interpret it. One thing I found interesting is that he seems not to believe in the work of traditional healers. He claimed that they were just making incisions and applying different kinds of powder on his legs without any success. One diviner drained some blood out of his legs in a procedure called *kununa*.¹⁴⁵ When he enquired about the cause, the diviner told him that he had stepped on some charms which were targeted to harm him.¹⁴⁶ He laughed and said that he does not believe in what most of the diviners said because they are 'liars'. It appears that he visited the diviners under the influence of his wife and other relatives. In fact his wife said "*gubine ughu utaya wa Kyala haga, utopilika mikota*" (this illness is not from God, it does not respond to medication). She said that she is hopeful that some other traditional healer will rise who can heal her husband.

Atanazio's story shows that the protracted illness made the family members seek healing from traditional doctors. The family members refused to believe the medical report but felt that some powers of witchcraft were involved and some of the diviners they consulted confirmed it. The illness became unnatural because it was not responding to treatment. It is noteworthy that Atanazio accepted to visit traditional healers for the sake of his family members because he appears not to have any trust in the healers and calls them 'liars'. He has now settled for medical treatment as a last resort. From the look of things, western medicine recognizes that there

¹⁴⁵ *Kununa* is one of the procedures that traditional healers do using a horn of a cow or other animals. It is an operation in which scarification is done to rid the body of the bad blood which is believed to cause pains in the body. Dunglison's Medical Dictionary defines scarification as "A small incision ... made into the skin with a lancet, bistoury, or sacrificator, for different therapeutical purposes—as to draw blood or discharge some effused fluid," p. 867. Scarification for therapeutic purposes used to happen in Europe until not so long ago, when it was abandoned as being counter-productive. Olubimpe Ayeni, "Observations on the Medical and Social Aspects of Scarification in Sub-saharan Africa," www.med.uottawa.ca/historyofmedicine/hetenyi/aye.htm#08 (15.2.2013).

¹⁴⁶ It is believed that witchcraft attacks have specific targets; one cannot be bewitched by accident.

are some incurable illnesses while traditional healing does not accept that. It is believed that a *ng'anga* always has a cure, even when it obviously does not work. In some cases it is the sufferer who quits consulting them after noticing that there is no improvement, or they have taken more than enough traditional medicines.¹⁴⁷

Atanazio and Getrude are committed Roman Catholic Christians. Atanazio does not attend church services because of mobility problems, but his wife participates in most of the church programmes. Both of them feel that there is nothing wrong with visiting *nchimi* and it does not affect their faith in Christ.¹⁴⁸ Getrude could be described as practicing dual religiosity because her belief in *nchimi* has become part of her life despite being a committed Christian. She believes that both must work concurrently. Her husband Atanazio could be placed on a different level because he thinks that diviners are liars. This shows that he does not assess the diviners in relation to his Christian faith, but based on the results of their services. This suggests that he would fully trust the diviners if one succeeded in healing him. His involvement is based on the influence from his family and he does not own it.

Illnesses that cannot be Treated Bio-Medically

Many Ngonde Christians believe that some illnesses cannot be treated bio-medically and must be taken to traditional healers who can heal them. Examples include illnesses that result from angry ancestors or curses from a living parent or guardian, *fimbuza*, and *chikoko*.

Illnesses Resulting from Curses

Some illnesses are perceived as being due to the anger from a dead ancestor or a curse (*kigune*) from a living parent or guardian. The illnesses can hardly be explained and sometimes people may think that someone has

¹⁴⁷ My personal experience: due to chronic illness my parents used to take me to various traditional healers and at some point we got tired or fed up and then we just stopped; not that I was healed but because we were tired and there wasn't much change. *Nchimi* Suzika explained that there is a cure for every illness because the supernatural are involved so they cannot fail to find a cure for every sickness.

¹⁴⁸ Even though some church members insist that they see nothing wrong with consulting diviners, the church leaders indicate that divination is not allowed for it draws Christians' faith away from God. For example, both Bishop Martin Mtumbuka of Karonga Diocese and Father Chitete, the Vicar General stated that the Roman Catholic Church teaches against divination for it encourages members to have faith in people/things other than Jesus Christ.

gone crazy. Sometimes the illness can be mistaken for *fimbuza*, but the diviners give guidance as to whether it is *fimbuza* or not.¹⁴⁹ The situation becomes a little easier when the one who is responsible for the illness (the one who cursed) is living. What should be understood is that except in cases where one's bones were removed as discussed in chapter two, the "curser" do not really know exactly what will happen to the one they are cursing. The elders or parents for example, may just say some words complaining about their child, then the child might face different kinds of difficulties and afflictions, some of which may include illness.

A member of Mbepo Last Church recalled an incident which happened to his cousin in 2009, a member of the Roman Catholic Church. His cousin picked a quarrel with his mother (a Roman Catholic) who did not agree with him on the woman that he wanted to marry. The cousin became very angry in the course of the argument and hit his mother twice so that she fell down. In the Ngonde culture, respect for one's parents is encouraged and hitting any of them is an abominable thing (*mwiko*).¹⁵⁰ The mother cried, not only because of the pain, but also because of the humiliation that her son subjected her to. The mother therefore took out her breast and squeezed it so that some liquid fell to the ground, and said, "*Linga uli mwana wangu, ukonkha libere lyangu kyala akugune, akwime lusayo lwake*" ("If you are really my son and you sucked from my breast, God should curse you and should not give you any blessing"). The son left and the parents did not know where he went, but later they heard that he had eloped his girlfriend and they lived 300 km away from them. Two months after he left home, he became paralyzed in both legs. His wife sent a message to his parents but they paid no attention. His cousin followed him and took him to a *nchimi* because he suspected that this happened because of the mother's curse. The *nchimi* confirmed the cousin's guess and advised that he should go to his mother for reconciliation because she had cursed him. He gave the son some medicine to take home which should be used in the reconciliation process. He gave instructions on what he should do and what the mother should do. When the boy was brought home, the mother refused to welcome him and she did not even want to see him. But her husband pleaded with her because the life of the son was at stake. They had to go near the kitchen. The mother was to stand in the kitchen and the

¹⁴⁹ For more on *vimbuza*, see Boston Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015.

¹⁵⁰ The Old Testament reflects a similar attitude, for example Ex 21:15, "Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death."

son to sit outside. The traditional medicine had to be mixed with water and the mother had to put some water in her mouth and squirting it on the son, through a small kitchen window, she was to say "*Fya ziuluke! Fya ziuluke! Katayamo kamo mu ndumbula yangu*" (Let misfortunes fly away, I don't have any grudge against you). After that, she had to use the same medicated water to rub on both legs of her son, and then hold his hands to help him stand on his feet, and he did! The son was able to walk again. They shook hands, the son apologized and the mother blessed him. The son then moved back to the village with his wife and they are living happily.

I asked the Last Church member how he felt as a Christian taking his cousin to a diviner, to which he responded that a diviner is God's gift to the world to make people's lives better, including that of Christians. He also claimed that the illness could not be treated at the hospital because it resulted from a curse. This response was not surprising because the Last Church is generally tolerant towards ATR elements. The son, who was a Roman Catholic just like his mother, defended himself by arguing that it was not his idea to go to see a diviner. I also asked the mother how, as a Christian, she felt about cursing her son, and then administering the traditional medicine from the diviner. She said it was a struggle for her to do all that, and her heart was still not at peace.¹⁵¹ She was embarrassed with what she did, and thinks things should have been better. It was imperative for her to administer the traditional medicine for her son's wellbeing.

The story above shows some degree of dual religiosity on the part the Last Church of God member who believes that the two religions must function side by side depending on the demands upon his life. It is difficult to situate the son as regards dual religiosity because he was the victim in need of help. His cousin made a decision on his behalf so he could not own it, even though he benefited from it. However, he expressed his appreciation for what his cousin did, for giving him back his life. The mother's involvement could be described as situational or accidental involvement in ATR elements related to cursing and healing, and this probably explains why she struggled in the whole restoration exercise.

¹⁵¹ This was my first experience to have a Roman Catholic confess that she struggled in her heart to be involved in ATR elements. I later discovered that she was a Baptist before she got married and the teachings from that church still influence her life even though she is a member of the Roman Catholic Church, following her husband.

A second example of illnesses resulting from a curse was narrated by Nambowe,¹⁵² a partially blind woman and a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC). She participates in most of the programmes of the church. It is believed that her blindness came because of violating some taboo (*mwiko*)¹⁵³ of the Ngonde culture, some twenty years ago. When she just got married, she was always expected to cover her head and part of her face when she was near her father-in-law.¹⁵⁴ When a daughter-in-law was going to draw water and then saw a father-in-law coming, she was expected to cover herself, and kneel down some distance away, to let him pass. After passing, the daughter-in-law was not expected to look at the father-in-law. Nambowe made the mistake of looking at her father-in-law and what made this worse was that the father-in-law looked back and saw her gazing at him.¹⁵⁵ Immediately, Nambowe realized that she could not see properly. She could not proceed to draw water but just waited to find someone who could take her home. She narrated her story to her mother-in-law and her husband. The mother-in-law talked to the husband about the issue, and he expressed his disappointment at what the daughter-in-law had done.¹⁵⁶ All of them: daughter-in-law, her husband, the mother-in-law and the father-in-law knew what caused the blindness but they could not do anything on their own. Although the whole family was Christian (AMEC), they decided to seek the services of a traditional healer and during those days, Mzgoka, a diviner, was famous. The mother-in-law and Nambowe's husband took her there and they spent two nights before returning home. The diviner confirmed that she was partially blind because she broke the taboo by looking at the father-in-law and needed to get some medicine in which the father-in-law was to take part in its administration. The unfortunate part was that while they were at the *nchimi*'s place, the house of the father-in-law caught fire as he was sleeping and he died of fire burns. Such being the case, the ritual to restore her sight could not be performed and that is why she was still partially blind at the time of the

¹⁵² Int. Falesi Nyambowe, Simwaba Village, AMEC, 10.3.2010.

¹⁵³ Breaking of taboos is followed by misfortunes or curses as the case may be.

¹⁵⁴ This custom has since changed. Daughters-in-law cover themselves the first few days after they get married, then the father-in-law gives them money (*kubongozga*) which signifies that she should be free and the two can talk to each other.

¹⁵⁵ I want to believe that the situation would have been different if the father-in-law had not looked back, even though the mother-in-law was of the view that the misfortune would still have befallen her, even without the father looking back.

¹⁵⁶ This is typical of a patriarchal society. The fact that the father-in-law looked at her is not an issue, the issue is that *she* looked at him.

interview. After the death of the father-in-law, she went to several other traditional healers, seeking help but without any success.

The action was taken based on their experience and worldview. Certain illnesses, straightforward as the case may look, are believed to be the result of a curse and therefore cannot be treated bio-medically. This is therefore a case of dual religiosity which was entered into due to protracted illness.

Fimbuza

Fimbuza is a disease which is caused by spirit possession. Different kinds of spirits possess an individual, namely, *vimbuza* (*fimbuza* in Kyangonde), *virombo* and *vyanusi*.¹⁵⁷ Being a spiritual disease it is believed that it can be treated using spiritual means. *Fimbuza* is one of the diseases whose cure involves the appeasement of the causative spirits. Several rituals are carried out by specialists in order to drive out the spirits possessing an individual. Donald Fraser, one of the early European missionaries observed:

Chirombo are spirits and are divided into four or five classes each requiring special treatment, and in all the shelves of the mission dispensary there is no medicine which deals with evil spirits. After all, what influence can a little pill have on an evil spirit? It requires more special treatment and a special language.¹⁵⁸

Those who believe that they suffer from *fimbuza* (spirit possession) cannot go to the hospital because hospitals are not able to diagnose that sickness since it is a traditional disease, an "African Illness."¹⁵⁹ The equipment at the hospital cannot find any disease in those who are suffering. The only thing the medical people will do is to send you to a mental hospital.¹⁶⁰ Some people think that sometimes a medical doctor would lie to a patient mentioning a certain disease in order to appear knowledgeable and not accept failure. The doctor will attempt to create a name for what he thinks the patient is suffering from. For example, one respondent explained that she was suffering from *fimbuza* and when she was taken to the hospital at one point she was told by hospital staff that she was suffering from

¹⁵⁷ For a detailed discussion on *vimbuza*, see Boston Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015, and Silas S. Ncozana, *The Spirit Dimension in African Christianity: A Pastoral Study among the Tumbuka People of Northern Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2002.

¹⁵⁸ Donald Fraser, *African Idylls*, London: Seeley Service, 1925, p. 193.

¹⁵⁹ Joseph DeGabriele, "When Pills don't Work – African Illnesses, Misfortune and Mdulo," *Religion in Malawi*, No. 9, 1999, pp. 9-23.

¹⁶⁰ Tabona Nachihana, Simon Village, Lupaso, 14.8.2010.

hysteria, an illness resulting from worries. She did not agree with them possibly because she did not want to be taken to the hospital in the first place. Her *fimbuza* do not allow her to go to hospital because they cannot stand the smell of clinical medicine.¹⁶¹ This is in line with what Joseph Gabriele observes "a patient goes to a doctor with an illness and comes back with a disease."¹⁶² Some of the sufferers of this disease can smell evil people, those who practice witchcraft. They can hardly stay in hospital. While other diseases are caused by germs and viruses and other means, *fimbuza* are not. Soko points out that there are no specific causes that one would take as symptoms due to lack of a consistent pattern. Some will experience high fever, pain in the teeth, loss of appetite, hallucination, etc. A possessed person manifests different symptoms depending on the type of possession. In one type of possession, "the person is convulsed and loses consciousness while in the other, the victim seems to remain the mistress of her body, at least in so far as the utilization of her limbs and her voice are concerned."¹⁶³

Case 1: Sellina, a Roman Catholic faithful, and a member of Chitemwano,¹⁶⁴ a women's group, shared an experience in her life. She suffered from *fimbuza* (spirit possession) for some time. At the beginning people felt that it was a "*msyuka*" (ancestral spirit) afflicting her. She was therefore taken to the grave of her dead father *kukalumbirira* (to say some words). An elder (her kinsman) took her there the first time. When the two approached the grave, they had to warn the spirits (several people were buried there) at the grave site that they were coming close to them:

Hodi! Hodi!	Knock! Knock!
Hodi! Hodi! Tata Mwakihana	Knock! Knock! Father (Mr.) Mwakihana
Ungaswigagha nisa nu mwana wako	Don't be surprised, I have brought your child
Twambilila tata, twapela.	Welcome us, father, please.

After warning them, the two went and knelt beside the tomb and threw an old coin on it. The interviewee did not know why an old coin was used. My view is that since the ancestors died long time ago, they would recognize it

¹⁶¹ Int. Elizabeth Nankhonde, Mwafilaso Village, 6.3.2011.

¹⁶² Joseph DeGabriele, "When Pills don't Work – African Illnesses, Misfortune and Mdulo," *Religion in Malawi* No. 9, 1999, pp. 9-23.

¹⁶³ Boston Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015.

¹⁶⁴ For details on Chitemwano see: Martha Mzumara, A History of Chitemwano Women Organization at St Augustine Parish in Mzuzu Diocese (1992–2012), Mzuni Document, 2013.

as an appeasement, since that is what they used when they were alive. In addition, old things are believed to be pure while new ones are contaminated. The elder said some words, pleading with the father's spirit to leave the daughter alone. After this simple ritual it was believed that she would be well. However, it seemed not to work. She continued to belch and to convulse. Smell of food like fish, meat, and pork could make her begin humming. Nothing had changed, she was still suffering. They then decided to go to Chilumba to a *ng'anga wa mizimu* (a diviner who engages spirits in her work), Miss Mazito. Through her spirit of divination, Mazito confirmed to Sellina that her father's spirit was troubling her and they needed to go to his grave and carry out a certain ritual to set her free. Mazito said this without asking Sellina to explain her problem. On the appointed day, she came to Sellina's village with her choir up to the father's grave. Sellina gave her the money she requested for her to perform the ritual. She went to the grave with the *nchimi* and the choir. Mazito threw¹⁶⁵ the money on the tomb and did the *kulumbirira* and the following were the words that were spoken:

Ninga gubine ubu	If this illness
Wasoka kumwinu tata	Has come from you, father
Mulekesye mwana	Leave your daughter alone [loosen her]
Ambilira ndalama isi	Receive this money [as a sacrifice]
Tuhobokera tata	Forgive us father
Muhobokera mwana wako tata twapera.	Please, forgive your daughter, father.

After the *ng'anga* had prayed, Sellina the patient also had to pray. She cannot remember what she included in her prayer, but the objective of her prayer was, to quote her own words "*kulamba kwa tata kuti andekesye ankhanitamya*" (to plead with my father to leave me alone). The words that she said were given to her by the *nchimi*. All this was being done while Sellina and Miss Mazito were in a kneeling position beside the tomb. They had to kneel to show respect to the ancestor. To crown it all, a goat was killed and all its blood was made to drip on the tomb, except a little, which was placed in a cup for Sellina to drink. This was given as a sacrifice to appease the spirits of her dead father. This could be equated to the element of *chilopa* in the healing process of *fimbuza* victim.¹⁶⁶ The *nchimi*

¹⁶⁵ The diviner threw the coin rather than place it on the tomb gently because she wanted to attract the attention of the spirits.

¹⁶⁶ Boston Soko explains that the rite of *chilopa* is an important element in the remedies of *vimbuza* (Kyangonde, *fimbuza*). Victims are made to suck blood from either a chosen bird or an animal. Sellina did not suck the blood from the goat but instead was given in a cup to drink, perhaps due to modification. Boston Soko, "The

carried the dead goat with her when she returned to Chilumba. After this ritual, *nchimi* Mazito took Sellina to Chilumba where she stayed for a month taking medicines for her to be completely healed. Sellina believes that her father's spirit heard her prayer and that of the *nchimi*, and she was healed. She confessed that after all the rituals, "*misyuka yapilika*" (the spirits listened). In the past, she could not eat pork, fish, meat and other food stuffs, nor could she stand the smell of such food. Today she comfortably eats all of these and does not get ill. From this story it can be gathered that illness can be caused by ancestors. Asked as to why her father's *misyuka* could trouble her she said that her father loved her so much that he wanted to live in her or take her home with him through death.

From Sellina's case a few things are noteworthy. There is a strong belief that spirit possession (or affliction) can be caused by departed spirits, among other causes. *Fimbuza* is a general term which is used to describe different types of spirit possessions, including *virombo* and *vyanusi*.¹⁶⁷ It is interesting that the dead father's spirit chooses whom to listen to during the ritual at his grave site. The first ritual was carried out by an elder kinsman of Sellina but she was not healed. The ritual which was performed by the *ng'anga wa mizimu* seemed to have yielded results. The father's spirit listened to the *ng'anga*, who is not related to him in any way, instead of the fellow kinsman. It is noteworthy that *misyuka* are said to "listen" (*yapilika*) only when one is healed or the illness is taken away. *Yapilika* is an equivalent of "they have answered positively." In addition, a *nchimi* has direct communication with the ancestors. In this case it appears that they listened to her as *nchimi* more than they did to the elders who took Sellina to the tomb the first time. The *nchimi* used a choir "to wake up her spirits" in order to be connected to the departed father's spirit. The healing that takes place is said to 'loosen' someone. The ancestor had to be appeased by giving money in order to forgive the afflicted. The fact that she was healed shows that the ancestors do hear whenever people speak to them. In addition, the spirits have to be given a sacrifice, in this case, an old coin, money and goat's blood¹⁶⁸ in order for a ritual to be complete. This is

Vimbuza Phenomenon: Dialogue with the Spirits," *Religion in Malawi*, No. 3, 1991, pp. 28-33.

¹⁶⁷ Soko also observes that most of his informants attribute the possessing spirits to their departed parents and grandparents and they are usually of the same lineage.

¹⁶⁸ The *ng'anga* took the goat with her to her home. This is perceived by many that some *ng'angas* use deception to acquire domesticated animals especially where

considered a form of appeasement to the spirits. Further, the ancestral spirit can bring harm to the living by afflicting them with illnesses because they "love" them so much.¹⁶⁹ Pain and love seem to be going together at the same time. The one being loved has to endure pain in her body for the sake of that love. At the same time, although the ancestor loves her so much, she has to do something to ward them off and leave her alone (*andekesye*).

Sellina's story is one among numerous stories that my respondents narrated concerning illnesses that are caused by ancestors. Belief in ancestral spirits having dealings with the living is one of the elements of ATR, yet Sellina, who is an active member of her church, sought their assistance when she was afflicted by the spirits. Asked if what she did was in conflict with her Christian faith, she said that there is no conflict because God has given everything for people to be helped with. She claimed that even her church does not have any problems with that.¹⁷⁰ This presents a case where dual religiosity is practised.

Case 2: Tusekile, a Presbyterian, church elder and leader of Umanyano¹⁷¹ tells how her husband, who is also a Presbyterian, was attacked by what she thinks is *fimbuza*, when he was working in a town in southern Malawi in 1976. This was believed to be caused by witchcraft by people from his village.¹⁷² He started behaving strangely and violently *linga fyasambuka* (when he was under attack). When he was taken to the hospital, it was decided that he should be taken to the mental hospital. He stayed in the hospital for three months and was discharged when he got better. While in hospital, the brother to the patient kept on pleading with the hospital personnel if they could discharge him so that he could take him to a traditional healer because he was suffering not from a mental problem but a spiritual one. The hospital personnel were not cooperative; they only

only a small part is required for a ritual. Sometimes a *ng'anga* asks for a whole goat and yet he uses only a small part of its tail, and keeps the whole goat for himself.

¹⁶⁹ This is related to some death adverts which appear in print media which read "We loved you much but God loved you more."

¹⁷⁰ Many Roman Catholic faithful, including the leaders that I interviewed, said the church does not take any action against those who openly visit diviners. However, this does not mean that the church approves of it. An interview with the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church clearly indicated that the church teaches against it.

¹⁷¹ Umanyano is the major women's grouping of the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia.

¹⁷² Some Ngonde believe that *fimbuza* is hereditary. If one has them, some of her children can have them too.

discharged him at the expiry of the three months. Tusekile said that it was difficult to smuggle in some traditional medicine because he was confined to a room and was being monitored by clinical staff because he could be violent at times. When he was discharged, she and other relatives were not convinced that he was cured, and the journey to different *ng'anga* started. The *ng'anga* told them that he had been bewitched by his uncle (a brother to his father) who was jealous of his success at work; and he wanted him to be out of the job and suffer. He was taken to one of the reknown diviners, by the name of Mzgoka, who, she said, healed her husband.

The problem reappeared nine years later. Her husband was due for promotion to head a department at a newly opened garrison in a few days. News spread and many people congratulated him, but one Friday morning when she waked her husband up for a shower, he refused. She could not understand what was happening. Asked as to whether he was sick, he said he was okay, but he refused to come out of the bedroom. He claimed that some soldiers were surrounding the house and they wanted to kill him, so he was not going out of the house. He could occasionally throw himself to the floor and scream "I am finished", or "Look at me (while touching his hands and legs), I have no blood." No one could understand him. When he was forced to go out of the house, he would scream, "Look at the soldiers, look at the guns, they want to kill me, leave me alone," and he would walk back into the house. This fits the description of *vyanusi*, a type of *fimbuza* which is "a form of mental illness in which the victim behaves in an abnormal way. If not attended, the patient can run mad."¹⁷³ He was then taken to the hospital but after a few days she and her brother in-law requested that he should be taken to 'his' *nchimi*. They released him. Even after treatment he could not accept to go to work and the *ng'anga* said his enemies had made a magical wreath (*wamunyengire nkhata*) so that he should not go back to work, especially to those who were coveting his new position. He assured Tusekile and his brother-in-law that once the patient goes back to the village he would be all right. He was therefore retired on medical grounds and when he went to his village and settled, he became well again.

Tusekile, in an effort to save the life of her husband visited various diviners despite being a Christian. The situation was desperate and she had to find a way out. That type of disease could not be treated medically because it was

¹⁷³ Boston Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015.

a spiritual one, which needed *nchimi* who are specialized in dealing with the spirits. Tusekile revealed that consulting diviners was a struggle for her because she is a Christian and her church does not allow consulting diviners. She was worried that she might be suspended from the church if the church leaders knew about it. She said that it was by the grace of God that the church leaders had mercy on her and overlooked her disobedience, because it was common knowledge in her village that she was consulting diviners. This is another example of dual religiosity.

Mental Illnesses

Mental illnesses belong to the category of those which some Ngonde believe cannot be healed bio-medically.¹⁷⁴ Among the Ngonde, mental illness is in many cases attributed to witchcraft. It is believed that no one can become mentally ill unless she is bewitched for some reason. Mental illnesses are quite distinct from *fimbuza*, although to some, those who suffer from *fimbuza* may behave as if they are mentally ill. *Fimbuza* has dancing to the drumbeats as part of the therapeutic measures, mental illness does not.¹⁷⁵

Annie Mwalwanda has a twenty-three year old son, Emmanuel, who suffered for five years from mental illness. It started as what was believed to be cerebral malaria. Some of the symptoms of cerebral malaria are "convulsions and neurological abnormalities."¹⁷⁶ Emmanuel was admitted to St. John's Hospital in 2003 for three weeks, where he was treated for cerebral malaria. There was little improvement at the expiry of the three weeks. Instead of getting better, he became so violent that his hands and feet had to be tied. Emmanuel was then transferred to a specialized mental hospital where he was treated for six months, with no remarkable improvement, according to Annie. Annie and her husband requested the

¹⁷⁴ I am aware that there are cases where full healing is achieved by pills and other therapies, in other cases permanent improvement is achieved. Of course, there are also incurable mental illnesses.

¹⁷⁵ Boston Soko, "The Vimbuza Phenomenon: Dialogue with the Sprits," *Religion in Malawi*, No. 3, 1991, pp. 28-33.

¹⁷⁶ "Cerebral Malaria: Symptoms and Treatment," www.buzzle.com/articles/cerebral-malaria-symptoms-and-treatment.html (16.2.2013).

hospital to have their son discharged so that they could try "other" hospitals.¹⁷⁷

When their request was granted, they took Emmanuel to various *nchimi*. One *nchimi*, Boyson Mwafongo, told them that the son was bewitched by his grandfather,¹⁷⁸ because he did not want him to be educated. The diviner put him on continuous treatment until he got well in 2008. Emmanuel is totally healed and was present during the interview, four years later. Although he got well in 2008, the parents could not send him back to school because the diviner warned that if they sent him to school, the illness would return.¹⁷⁹

When all this was happening, Annie was already a Seventh-day Adventist, a deaconess, a member of Dorcas,¹⁸⁰ and a member of the building committee. She attended church regularly and participated in many activities of the church. Annie was fully aware that her church does not approve of *nchimi* consultation and suspends anyone who is found doing it. However, she was more worried about her son's health than about keeping the rules of the church.¹⁸¹ She indicated that she was lucky because no one reported her to the church leaders. She stayed at the *nchimi*'s place for three months and on her return, church members, including leaders, came to see and greet her and her son. Their assumption was that she had been

¹⁷⁷ The hospitals being referred to here were traditional healers, but they did not mention that for fear of offending hospital personnel.

¹⁷⁸ The *nchimi* gave Annie and her husband a letter to the chief, inviting the perceived 'wizard' to meet him. Annie, her husband and the 'wizard' visited the *nchimi* who made some cuts on the wizard's forehead and told him to stop what he was doing. This is in line with what *nchimi* Chikanga was doing to witches and wizards. "All witches and wizards received cuts or incisions on the forehead as a form of punishment so that everybody would be made aware of their status; but it would also act as an antidote against a relapse into witchcraft practices." Boston Soko, *Nchimi Chikanga: The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008, p. 70.

¹⁷⁹ Int. Annie Mwalwanda, Kalambo Village, 16.8.2012.

¹⁸⁰ This is a women's grouping of Seventh-day Adventist Church. See: Frank Chirwa, *A Critical Examination of the Changing Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Malawi: A Historical, Theological and Socio-Cultural Analysis*, PhD, Mzuzu University, 2014.

¹⁸¹ It is noteworthy that some Christians are afraid of doing things that are deemed unacceptable by the church, not because the Biblical teaching is against it. When the morality of their actions is questioned, they rush to pointing out that the church does not allow it, instead of saying God will not be pleased with it.

to the hospital in Mzuzu. This is a case of dual religiosity, where it was believed that healing of a mental illness can only be done by *nchimi* and not through bio-medical means.

Hospitals are far from where they Live

Some people still live very far from hospital, especially those who live in rural areas. They cannot pass by one or two traditional healers on the way to the hospital if they think that the nearest traditional healer is able to treat the illness. Sometimes government hospitals do not have the medicines to treat them. For instance, in the remote areas, when one goes to the hospital, the most common drug used to treat almost any kind of ailment is Panadol (or Aspirin). Some people think going to hospital is not worth it. Those who go to hospitals come back disappointed and go to a traditional healer, who may not have the right medication or may not even know how to treat a particular illness. Regardless of these challenges he will still assure the patient that he knows the problem and it will go away. It is this assurance that psychologically speeds up the healing process, even with no proper medication. Margaret Kawonga, who stays very close to a traditional healer, Fatima, thinks it is a waste of time for her to go to the hospital when she can be treated right there. She does not have to spend money on transportation, and sometimes even on buying the medicines from a pharmacy. She also added that due to shortage of clinics, "the hospital is normally overcrowded and only those who have relatives as members of staff are given priority to get the 'best' treatment."¹⁸² The good thing is that Fatima refers cases she cannot treat to Karonga District Hospital.¹⁸³ In addition, it is cheap because many of the traditional healers do not charge any money and Fatima is one of such traditional healers.¹⁸⁴

An active member of Mwantende Baptist Church, narrated that he visits *nchimi* frequently because the hospital is very far. He takes his wife and his children to the *nchimi* as well. Mwangomba explained that whenever he falls sick, whether *gubine gwa Kyala* or *wabulosi*, (whether the illness is from God or from the witches), he goes to a *nchimi*. He has been to the

¹⁸² Int. Margaret Kawonga, Mwakasoko Village, 3.3.2011.

¹⁸³ Int. Fatima Sichinga (diviner), Mwakasoko Village, 3.3.2011.

¹⁸⁴ Ruth Nkhambule, in her study, found out a similar thing. Christians consult traditional healers due to economic factors. For more details see *An Investigation into the Stand and Experience of the Christian Communities on Traditional Medicine: A Study of Some Christian Communities in Lilongwe, Area 2*, Mzuzu University: BA, 2010.

nchimi many times but the most memorable visit was when he had problems with his arm. He could hardly stretch it. The diviner treated it and it is functioning well. The church teaches against visiting *nchimi* but he feels that each time he goes to *nchimi* he gets the help that he and his family need.¹⁸⁵ His dual religiosity is real but done out of convenience. It is clear that, if a clinic could be constructed nearby, he would opt for that, since he is aware that God is not pleased with him consulting *nchimi*.

The idea that some Christians are tempted to consult traditional healers because they are close to them was also highlighted by leaders of Mpata CCAP.¹⁸⁶ They pointed out that *ng'anga* and *nchimi* discipline cases are common in the church because the *ng'anga* and *nchimi* are all over. When those involved in these discipline cases are counselled, they explain that they consulted them because they are close and available.¹⁸⁷

Pressure from Relatives

Some who are Christians claim that they found themselves at a traditional healer's place not because they wanted to, but because they were pressed or tricked into it. When one's illness persists, members of the family meet together to make a decision on what should be done to save the life of their relative. If you are the one who is ill, and helpless, you just have to give in to what others say, and you go where they say you should go because you are desperate for help. One cannot say no because she does not belong to herself alone, but to others as well.

Case 1: Anganile, a committed member of Karonga Living Waters Church, says she was sick at one time and was bed-ridden. The next day her mother told her to clean herself up because they were going to seek treatment for her illness. She did as instructed and she assumed that they were going to the hospital. She did not even bother to ask her mother where they were going because that was her expectation. The mother carried her on her bike and headed to a traditional healer's compound. She was treated but claims that she did not recover from the illness.

¹⁸⁵ Int. NN, Mwantende Village, 21.3.2012.

¹⁸⁶ For the history of Mpata Congregation, see Frank Kadogana, *The Origin and Growth of Karonga CCAP Mission in Karonga and Chitipa from 1900 – 2013*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2015, pp. 76 and 77.

¹⁸⁷ Int. Mclean Mwanjabe, Session Clerk and Watson Mwakasekere, Church Elder, 20.3.2012.

She shared yet another incident: as she was about to write Junior Certificate examinations, she got very sick and could not walk. She was not comfortable with traditional medicines and her parents were aware of that because she was "born again". After being sick for seven days (protracted illness), she slept and her mother took advantage of that and made some incisions in some parts of her body. When she woke up she got very angry with her mother and prayed that the Lord should not heal her so that the people around her should know that "those" things do not work. Seven days passed, and there was no improvement. She then prayed for God's healing – "Lord allow me to walk" and she walked! People were surprised that she got up and went to the bathroom to take a shower without any assistance.

Anganile is born again and was not comfortable with traditional medicine, although such use of medicine may not be classified as dual religiosity according to this study. Her mother is not a very committed Christian and had no problems to consult a *ng'anga*. It is her mother who may be described as being dual religious.

Case 2: Michael, a 'born again' Presbyterian Christian shared his story of how he struggled with his parents when he suffered from a disease, which required a blood transfusion every six months. His parents, who are active Presbyterians, believed that their son was bewitched so that his body ran out of blood repeatedly. The medical personnel had their own explanation for Michael's condition and Michael believed them. He explained that he took it as a prayer 'petition' and shared with his prayer partners so that God could touch and heal him. The parents kept pushing him to go with them to a diviner but he resisted. He kept praying for two years, and was prayed for on several occasions by pastors from Charismatic churches, but the problem did not go away. One day, while at home, he just collapsed due to low blood level in his body. The parents rushed him to the hospital, the father donated the blood and he vowed that he was doing it for the last time. The father warned Michael that no one would be allowed to give him blood again because he was stubborn. When he recovered he gave in to his parents' demand that they consult a diviner just to be at peace with them. The diviner performed his procedures on his body, and since that time, he has never had any blood transfusion. At the time of interview, it had been three years since he got his healing, but he is really at a loss as to whom he should attribute it. His prayer partners feel that God had already healed him in answer to their prayers, before he went to the diviner. Michael's parents told him that he made a good decision by going to the diviner

because that saved his life. However, his prayer partners no longer associate with him because they regard him as backslidden because he went to a diviner.

The cases presented above are examples of occasions in which some Christians participate in ATR, especially when seeking healing. However, this must not be understood to be dual religiosity because it is unintentional participation, not a planned one. Those involved bowed down to pressure; it is not habitual.

Perceptions about Causation

Some do visit traditional practitioners because they believe that they have been bewitched. This is another major reason why people visit traditional healers. This emanates from perceptions about causation of illnesses and misfortunes. Belief in witchcraft is strong even among Christians.

Belief in witchcraft is an essential part of the religion of the traditional people of Africa. It is that aspect which has changed least under the impact of Christianity and Western civilization. Even in urban areas it is so widespread that in many cases the one who combats witchcraft (a traditional doctor or medicine man) has more "patients" than the Western-trained medical doctor.¹⁸⁸

This is common when there is sudden illness. Many people expect that illness must come powerfully but slowly. For example, if someone is cultivating in her field and then collapses, foul play is suspected, especially if she did not complain about any pain in her body. People will normally say "She has been okay all this morning, we do not know what happened, perhaps someone has sent *chilaso*" (pneumonia).¹⁸⁹ Such sudden illness will be taken to a traditional healer, and as is always expected, he will say that someone sent *chilaso* (pneumonia) for the reason he specifies.

Case 1. Two families quarreled over border issues for their farm-land. One family accused the other of encroaching on their land and they talked over

¹⁸⁸ G. van der Merwe, "Communicating to Peoples of African Traditional Religions," in *Reflecting on Mission in the African Context: A Handbook for Missiology*, by A.A. Odendaal, P.J. Robinson, G. van der Merwe (eds), Bloemfontein: Pro Christo, 1987, pp. 115-132.

¹⁸⁹ *Chilaso*, which is (insufficiently) translated pneumonia in English, is used to refer to an illness in which a person feels pain in a certain part of the body and that pain is accompanied by pricking. It is widely believed among the Ngonde that witches are responsible for inflicting one with *chilaso*.

this issue again and again but could not agree. One day, during the rainy season, the gentleman who was accused of encroaching hired three men to work on his land. When the owner of the land heard that some men were working on the controversial land, he rushed to the scene with his son, to stop the men from working. The men insisted that they were sent by their 'boss' to do the work and as such they would not stop. The owner of the land, with the help of his son, snatched the hoes from the men. The three men went back their boss to report what had happened. The 'boss' Mwambira hurried to the other gentleman's home where they quarrelled for a while and fighting ensued. Some people intervened and stopped the fight. They advised the two to use dialogue to resolve their issue rather than fighting. They promised not to fight again but discuss the issue further. In the evening of the same day, the purported owner of the land's son fell ill. He just collapsed and started sweating. He eventually fainted. His family panicked. They poured cold water on the head and wiped his face with a wet towel, but he could not regain conscience. The family then decided to take him to a *nchimi* because they suspected that the encroacher had bewitched him because Mwandepeka had picked a quarrel with him earlier in the day. This seemed to be an 'obvious' case to the owner of the land and they needed not to waste time to go to the hospital.

A leader in the African Methodist Episcopal Church,¹⁹⁰ sought healing from a diviner, because he felt that his son was bewitched due to the quarrels he had earlier on. As a Christian and a leader, his conscience was very clear and he did not see any problem with visiting the diviner because that saved the life of his son. This would be a case of dual religiosity. The pastor of the church informed me that Christians are allowed to visit *ng'anga* but not *nchimi*. Those who go to *nchimi* are counselled and not suspended or excommunicated from the church because the church teaches that God himself is the one who removes people from the church.¹⁹¹

Case 2. A member of Karonga Baptist Church shared a story of how his daughter fell ill after a sleepless night with an owl hooting on the roof of their house.¹⁹² When he and his family went to bed, everything was fine. In

¹⁹⁰ The church is commonly found in Karonga and it was planted in 1943. Devlin Chirwa, *The History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Malawi: The Karonga Branch (1943 – 2000)*, Seminar paper, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Chancellor College, 2002.

¹⁹¹ Int. Pastor NN, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Mwafilaso Village, 4.3.2011.

¹⁹² Among the Ngonde, an owl is believed to be one of the animals in which witches reside and its presence signifies the presence of a witch. This is a belief that

the middle of the night, his wife woke him up to listen to the noise made by the claws of an owl and the hooting. He quickly rose up and went outside, looked at the roof, and indeed there was an owl. He rushed to the kitchen to see if the fire was still alive and found one piece of wood still burning. He said that normally his wife does not leave the fire burning. This time, however, it was left burning because several owls were seen perching in trees near his home that week. He threw the burning wood¹⁹³ at the owl and spoke to it to go away. The owl flew away immediately. Around 4.00 o'clock in the morning, his daughter was heard groaning in her room. He and his wife rushed to the room and found the daughter sweating and short of breath. He took a bicycle and rushed her to a *nchimi*. To his amazement, the *nchimi* told him how the owl visited his home and caused harm to his daughter even before he explained his story to him.¹⁹⁴

Though a Christian, the Baptist member holds on to beliefs about animals in which sorcerers dwell and rushes to the diviner as the right person to deal with an illness resulting from witchcraft. He claimed that it was obvious to him that his daughter's illness was a witchcraft attack and he automatically knew where to go. He did not even consult his wife; it was a clear-cut situation. Although he was aware that it was not proper for him to go to a diviner as a Christian, he argued that the situation dictated it. There was a crisis and he had to act fast. He was glad that it happened at night so people did not know where he had gone with the daughter. In a way, he cared about his church rule and not necessarily his spiritual life. This is one of the cases of dual religiosity where one puts his faith in both Christianity and ATR elements; it is the situation that dictates to which religion he should pay allegiance.

Perception of causation is also evident when people lose their loved ones and feel it necessary to consult *nchimi* to find out who caused the death. Some consult the *nchimi* so that they can know, while others want to know so that they can revenge. There are occasions when one consults a *nchimi* just to know, while the diviner may ask the client what he wants done to the witch or wizard. It is up to the client to choose. Some do decide to revenge after learning from the diviner that it is possible to do that.

is refusing to die. Cf. Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *Spirit Ridden Konde*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1925, p. 100.

¹⁹³ It is widely believed that witches or sorcerers cannot stand the sight of fire so it is a good tool to chase them away.

¹⁹⁴ Int. NN.

Ivy Mwantalula shared about her journey to the *nchimi* to find out who killed her son. She had six children; two daughters and four sons. She has so far lost all the sons, and the husband. The last son passed away in February, 2012.¹⁹⁵ When she lost her second born son, she could hardly believe it, because it was a sudden death. She therefore wanted to find out how he died and who killed him. She and her daughter Lusekero went to a '*ng'anga ya galasi*', a traditional healer who uses a 'mirror', which she said was a piece of cloth pasted on the wall. She claims that she saw everything in that mirror, just like people see pictures in a video. She saw the events that led to her son's death and those who played a part in it. For her to see the scene she was instructed by the diviner to call out the name of the dead son and he came onto the scene, lying on the hospital bed. The one who is believed to have killed him through magic appeared and came closer to the bed. The son wanted to rise up from the bed, but the wizard pressed him down.¹⁹⁶ She asked her son who it was that killed him. Several people showed up one by one. When the first showed up, she asked the son, 'Is this the one?' The son nodded. Ivy stated that she did not hear the son's voice; she could only see gestures. However, the son could hear her voice, because he appeared to be responding to her questions. Then she asked the son, 'Who else was involved?' Several people lined up. The first person she saw was a brother to her late husband whom she had been suspecting of being responsible for the deaths of her other sons and her husband. The others were also related to her family, from her late husband's side. After watching everything, she was satisfied that she knew them, but she did not want to revenge. She believes that God will do it on her behalf.

Ivy is an active Roman Catholic Christian, a member and treasurer of Chitemwano, a church treasurer, and treasurer of *uzengezani* (prayer cell). She mentioned that she consults traditional healers, including *nchimi*, often depending on the various demands upon her life. She stated that her life has been pathetic and full of misery, surrounded by illnesses, deaths of loved ones and an accident.¹⁹⁷ She is fully aware that the church teaches

¹⁹⁵ Int. Ivy Mwantalula (not real name), Shemu Mwakasungula Village, 15.3.2012.

¹⁹⁶ This sounds like necromancy, like the one recorded in 1 Sam 28. Necromancy "signifies conversing with the dead for purposes of consultation or divination." R. Laird Harris, "Necromancer, Necromancy," in J.D. Douglas (ed), *New International Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987, p. 698.

¹⁹⁷ In 1999, she was involved in a car accident where she fractured an arm, three ribs and fingers of her right hand. She suspects that the accident was the work of witchcraft.

against divination because it is tantamount to worshipping other gods. She claims that she repents each time she goes to a diviner, so that God can forgive her. She tells God that it is not deliberate but the situation makes her go against his will. Hers is therefore a case of dual religiosity, based on perception of cause of illness and death.

Namwayi, a committed member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, lost a brother who died suddenly in 1993. The day he died, he did not complain of any pains. He ate his supper quite well, but in the morning, he was found lying under his bed, lifeless. The family members were surprised that they found the dead body *under* the bed instead of *on* the bed. She and her other relatives rushed him to hospital where he was pronounced dead. Namwayi's family did not accept this death, although they buried the remains. However, a few days after burial, she and her elder brother visited a *nchimi* who told them that the brother's death was the result of witchcraft. Namwayi's cousin had bewitched the brother. As a wizard, he hit Namwayi's brother with a 'magical hammer' leading to a sudden death. After knowing who killed him, the *nchimi* asked them what they wanted to be done to the 'wizard'. They told him that he should die. The *nchimi* gave her and her elder brother traditional medicine to be placed on the deceased's tomb. The *nchimi* assured the two that the one who killed Namwayi's brother would die in a few days. They placed the medicine on the tomb. Nineteen years later the cousin is still alive. Namwayi indicated that she did not go back to the *nchimi* for further consultation. She has decided to drop the issue because nothing will bring her brother back to life.¹⁹⁸

Namwayi explained that her conscience troubles her because what she did makes her feel that she was fighting with God. She mentioned that it was sinful, but interestingly, she shared more stories of her visitations to *nchimi* for reasons other than fact-finding.¹⁹⁹ Namwayi stated that she consulted *nchimi* because she was confused with the death of her cousin who was her

¹⁹⁸ This appears to be a sign of resignation. People are not bold enough to confront a *nchimi* when his medicine does work or when his predictions do not come to pass. This results from fear of the consequences since it is believed that he can harm those who try to challenge his predictions. Nyaluhanga's conclusion was that the cousin had very powerful *nyanga* which overpowered the medicines that the *nchimi* gave her. Her assumption is that the cousin bought his witchcraft equipment from a more powerful *nchimi* than the one who gave them the medicines.

¹⁹⁹ She went to a *ng'anga* when she could not have a baby and to get love potions when her husband was believed to be going out with other women.

bread winner. Being a widow, he took care of her and provided everything she needed. She consulted *nchimi* because of her perception of the cause of the death of her brother.

Another case is that of Feston, of Church of Christ. In 1995 Feston married a pregnant woman and it was not a secret that he was not the father of the child the woman was carrying. He accepted to take care of the woman in her pregnancy because he loved her. She gave birth to a baby boy. His relatives, especially his parents and paternal aunts were not happy because this meant that the baby boy needed to be provided with land for building a house and for cultivation in later years, yet he did not belong to their clan. He was a *msiwana*. It would have been better if it were a girl because she would be married off and the family would benefit from the dowry. But Feston loved the boy and alleged that when he was five years old, his biological father and his aunt, with the help of other relatives, bewitched him. On the fateful day, Feston left home for work leaving the boy in good health. While at work, he got a message that his son had some convulsions and had been rushed to hospital. He followed his wife to the hospital and was informed that the son had passed away on arrival. Feston did not even wait for burial but went straight to a diviner, a Mr. Thupa, because he suspected that the boy had been bewitched. When he arrived at Thupa's place, he did not have to explain his story. Thupa told him that he had come to consult about the death of his son. The diviner gave him some medicine which was to be placed in a basin, and mixed with water. The mixture was to be used to wash the dead body before burial. He was also given a broom.

When he arrived at home, he found that the body had already been washed and dressed in his absence. Feston insisted that the body should be washed again. He washed the body under the protest of his father and other relatives.²⁰⁰ He then put the body in the coffin. During burial, the coffin was lowered into the grave, accompanied by the basin he had used for washing the dead body, and the broom.²⁰¹ That same night, Feston's biological father was heard groaning loudly from outside. When family members went

²⁰⁰ Under normal circumstances, a father neither washes the dead body of his own child nor places it in the coffin himself. This was an extreme case; probably due to the involvement of a diviner whose instructions had to be followed by Feston.

²⁰¹ The broom was meant to sweep all those who took part in killing the child. They would all die. One of course would question the wisdom of Feston to kill his own father and aunt for the sake of a child who was not his. Many suspected that the woman that Feston married had given him love potion (*temwanene*) to behave so stupidly.

out, they found him lying beside the boy's tomb. The father died a week later. Following the death of the child, three of the five people who the diviner claimed to have taken part, died one after another.²⁰² This kind of death is known as *lukwebo* in Kyangonde. Feston's relatives requested him to remove the broom from the grave to prevent further loss of lives. Feston claims that the *balosi* stopped dying after he had taken the broom out of the grave.

Feston indicated that Church of Christ teaches that God does not allow consultation of *nchimi* but people can use traditional medicine. However, as a human being, he cannot do without them. He claimed that even the church leaders also consult *nchimi* although they teach against them, because they are also human beings. According to him, the events leading to his son's death and its aftermath are clear evidence that both the illness and the death did not come from God and that he did the right thing to consult the *nchimi*. He does not consider himself responsible for the father's death and that of the other relatives. It is their actions (*fyokorakora*); that is, using *nyanga* (witchcraft tools), that led to their deaths. He asked, "Did I touch him? Did I give him medicine to drink? Did I bewitch him? He was responsible for his death for being evil." Feston stated that he has no regrets for the death of the boy's biological father because he was an evil person. So, just like in the stories above, Feston consulted *nchimi* due to his perception of the illness and death of his foster son. This is a clear case of dual religiosity.

Being Troubled by Witches

Many Christians live in fear of witchcraft and they use traditional ways to ward it off. "Witchcraft offers its adherents the opportunity to oscillate between traditional religion and Christianity."²⁰³

Stella is a 'born again' Christian and a member of Karonga CCAP. Before she became born again she and her husband would go to *ng'anga* because witches disturbed them during the night so that they were unable to sleep. They knew this because sometimes they could feel someone sitting on

²⁰² Even though it is indicated that they died one after the other, Feston's aunt died a year after the death of Feston's father, and his cousin died two and a half years later. It is possible that the other two died of other causes rather than taking part in the death of the child.

²⁰³ Opoky Onyiah, a Pentecostal pastor quoted in "Who's Afraid of Witches? Among African Christians, too many of us are," in *Christianity Today*, written by Sunday Agang, <http://www.ctlibrary.com> (21.9.2011).

them as they lay down, chocking them in the process. They could also hear birds flying in the roof of their house, and whistling and footsteps. On many occasions they could wake up tired, showing that witches were using them to do manual labour or other tasks at night.²⁰⁴ In addition, they did a lot of mumbling (*kulabaya*) in their sleep. Traditional healers advised them to 'close the house' using charms to stop the witches from having access to their house and bodies. Stella explained that when the witchdoctor fortified the house, there could be peace for two or three days; they could sleep peacefully. At the expiry of these days, chaos would return.

Later, she developed a problem of high blood pressure and this made her visit more traditional healers, but she could not be healed. She then started attending prayers and she was prayed for. There, healing came her way. She developed a new relationship with Jesus Christ although she had been a "Christian" for many years. When this happened, she went home and took out all traditional medicines and charms she was keeping in her home for her ailment as well as for house protection, and burned them. She and her husband were able to sleep peacefully after burning them. Stella explained that she was visiting the traditional healers because she was not rooted in the word and that she had little faith.

To be 'Searched' (Kusecheka)

People do not go to diviners only when something is wrong with their lives. Many go to a diviner just to know what their life has in store for them, a kind of foretelling. In the process of *kusecheka*, the diviner may discover that his client is sick, something the client was not aware of. The diviner normally uses *misyuka* (spirits) in this process with the help of the choir. The choir is very instrumental in driving the diviner into ecstasy so that he can be connected with the spirits which deliver the messages to convey to his client.²⁰⁵ Sometimes their predictions come to pass, while others do not. Examples of bad predictions were those made for me when I was taken to a diviner by my parents when I was ill while in grade 8. The diviner predicted that I would not continue with my education, that I was not going to get married; however, if the spirits were lenient with me, I would get married

²⁰⁴ This is a common belief among the Ngonde, but there is no proof that it really happens.

²⁰⁵ Boston Soko, writing about *nchimi* Chikanga, explains that the choir presents a powerful background to the work of a diviner, which creates a trance-like atmosphere. *Nchimi Chikanga. The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2002, p. 35.

but would not have any children. My parents were Christians of good standing with their church. Of course I believed him. However, all this was bad prediction. During the same divination exercise, the diviner instructed my uncle who was looking for his cow that was stolen to go to Songwe border and look for it at a specific place. He went and found it exactly where the diviner had mentioned. It is very difficult to tell a *nchimi* that he is telling lies because one cannot afford to embarrass him in front of others. He is feared because it is widely believed that he can use his magic to harm people who offend him.



Figure 2: *Nchimi Suzika 'searching' clients* Figure 3: *Suzika and his wife preparing medicines for patients*

There are also people who go to the diviner's place for entertainment.²⁰⁶ During the searching exercise, as the choir sings and the diviner dances and makes his movements, sometimes accompanied by certain rituals, people find it funny. Some Christians just want to watch and listen to what is said about other people because all is said in public; there is no privacy.²⁰⁷ Christians justify their presence by saying that they do not go there to seek help but just entertainment and they do not see any problem with that.²⁰⁸ However, this is questionable since no serious Christian would want to be

²⁰⁶ When I attended a divination exercise by *nchimi Suzika* on a Sunday afternoon, I did a random interview of some who were present to find out why they came. A reasonable number indicated that they came just "to watch."

²⁰⁷ In some cases, the choir sings so that others may not hear what the diviner says about a particular client. However, some diviners stop the choir when they have something to say to a client. I have attended several divination sessions where choirs were stopped whenever a diviner wanted to say something to the client.

²⁰⁸ Int. Chalira Mwambira, Simon Village, 14.8.2010.

found in such places. For Charismatics, such places provide a way through which demons may enter a Christian.²⁰⁹

To Inquire about the Lost

Christians also go to the diviner to inquire about lost items, animals or people. Some diviners are able to tell where they can be found. One respondent, Mwalukubo, a Christian of Kabale African International Church, had his twelve-year child missing for seven months. He went to a diviner, Suzika, who located him at a place in Tanzania. Suzika explained that he uses a mirror (*galasi*),²¹⁰ with the help of spirits and a rod, which is adorned with beads and a piece of animal skin.²¹¹ Mwalukubo was given a concoction to drink to enable him to see in the mirror. When time came, he and Suzika went into a small room and looked into the mirror while calling the name of the child. The child appeared in the mirror, and Suzika claims that the spirits communicated to him the name of the place where the child could be found. The father left the next day for Tanzania and brought his child back safely. The father of the child is thankful to God for using Suzika



to locate his child. Mwalukubo did not experience any conflict between his Christian faith and his involvement in ATR because he believes that *kisu kosa ka Kyala* (the whole world is God's) implying that people should make use of what God has given, and diviners are part of that. Mwalukubo could be described as practicing dual religiosity since he believes that both Christianity and ATR elements have a place in his life, and could be utilized to meet his needs.

²⁰⁹ Int. Pastor Noriah Harawa, Church on the Wings, 13.3.2012.

²¹⁰ Suzika is popularly known as *ng'anga ya galasi*, but he doesn't use an actual mirror. What one finds in one of the rooms in his house are pieces of white cloth pasted on the wall which he refers to as mirrors.

²¹¹ Int. Suzika Mogha, Mwakasoko Village, 4.3.2011.

Another example is Mwakwamba, a committed Christian of Ngerenge Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi, whose two oxen were stolen from the kraal when he was using them to cultivate his farm land. He rushed to *nchimi* Fyapabwelu who asked Mwakwamba to bring one of his other cattle so that he could perform a ritual which would make the other two oxen come back. The *nchimi* took a white cloth and dipped it into a pot full of herbs and covered the head and the eyes of the oxen while speaking *Ing'ombe syayonga, sipilike kubaga kwako sibwereko* (the cattle that are missing should return upon hearing you moo). When the *nchimi* removed the cloth, the cattle started to moo all the way to Mwakwamba's home and he arrived late in the evening. Early in the morning, he found the two oxen in the kraal and was very happy. Mwakwamba strongly believes that Fyapabwelu helped to bring back the oxen. Though a committed Christian, Mwakwamba visited a *nchimi* and was glad he did because it would have been a difficult farming season if the cattle had gone missing permanently. This is yet another case of dual religiosity.

Protective and Prosperity Medicines

Protective medicine is used in many different ways and for different purposes. Some have to visit a traditional doctor to get the needed medicine, while certain circumstances just require knowledge from elders and friends.

Baby Protection

Many Christians do participate in rituals associated with birth and pregnancy, either voluntarily or involuntarily, that might have a connection with elements of African Traditional Religion. Many families want to protect their babies from *mioto*²¹² and therefore the baby will have to be washed with medicated water on the day she is taken out of the house for the first time (at least permanently, because when the child is being taken from the hospital to home the mother may walk outside with her baby). It might not be necessary to consult traditional doctors for this kind of medicine. Some elderly women will provide this medicine especially when it is time to take the child and the mother out of their confinement (*luvumbo*). The child will

²¹² *Mioto* is a disease that a child may suffer from if people who have slept with members of the opposite sex hold her. The child may suffer from diarrhoea, experience dry mouth, swelling of the abdomen, among other ailments. This is an equivalent of *mdulo* that Breugel discusses. For a detailed discussion on *mdulo* see J.W.M. van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2001, pp. 169-210.

be washed in medicated water and the type of medicine that is commonly used is *muzakaka*. Next, some charms will be prepared for the mother to tie medicated necklaces around the child's neck, waist, wrists and ankles to protect him from witchcraft attacks.²¹³ If the mother is having her first baby, she will have all this done for her. For those who are having the second or additional children, they will only require the elderly women to wash the baby on the day of coming out, but she will have learnt how to make the strings and she can take care of that for the other babies. She will have learnt what to put inside a small 'pillow' that goes around the child's neck and other amulets for protection.²¹⁴ Many Christians do not really intend to use protective medicine on their babies but are compelled by those in authority. For example, in many Christian families where other traditional rituals are ignored, the husband's mother still brings traditional medicine for the child. A wife who believes in Christianity will be threatened by the mother-in-law that if she does not use this medicine and the grandchild dies, 'she will eat the meat.' This implies that the mother of the child will be responsible for the death since she neglected some of the traditional medicine due to her faith in Christ. If the child dies, the consequences will be terrible on her part.²¹⁵

Naming after an ancestor is normally done for remembrance but some do that to keep ties with them. Some Christians do believe that the spirit of the deceased comes back to live in an individual, especially when one walks, laughs or does certain things exactly the way the ancestor did it. However, it must be pointed out the issue of the spirit coming to dwell in a child is not very much pronounced among the Ngonde.

A member of Kasantha Seventh-day Adventist Church who is a mother of six children stated that each of the children underwent all the rituals that go along with birth. She explained that the church teaches against such practices but that she felt that she had to comply with what the elder women

²¹³ Some of the Christians that I interviewed did not see any relationship between the two (ATR and Christianity) since they consider them to be separate, i.e. they did not understand why I asked them how they felt about their Christian faith after doing such practices.

²¹⁴ This belief is widely held even elsewhere in Malawi. See Albert Sharra, "Do Babies Need Amulets (*Mphinjiri*)?" *Nation on Sunday*, Sunday, 21 April, 2013, vol 8, no. 16. It is believed that a baby without an amulet is exposed to health risks and even sudden death originating from witchcraft. Amulets hold the health and life of the baby.

²¹⁵ Int. Emily Mboma, Simon Village, 16.8.2011.

(including her mother in-law) advised her. However, she made sure that this was done in secret (mostly at night) for fear of reprisal from the church. She defended her actions by saying that "*ifya chikhristu ni fya chititu fikulwa haga*" (Christianity and ATR are not at war; they coexist). This presents a situation where dual religiosity is practised though it is mainly the traditional medicine that is utilized. The charms that are used and carried around wherever the child goes may in a way affect one's object of faith.²¹⁶

It is noteworthy, though, that some Christians do reject such practices because of their faith. For instance, Florence Sikwamba shared that she resisted pressure from parents and relatives to have her two children, who were born three years apart, to go through the ritual bath. She cited her Christian faith as one of the reasons for rejecting such things.²¹⁷ Although she received threats that the children would not survive or they would be sickly, none of such things happened. Her children are now aged eight and eleven. Her personal faith in Christ helps her to resist "the temptation of making use of elements of traditional religion."

Body Fortification

Apart from the protection of the child, family members may seek traditional doctors' help to protect their bodies. Fortification of bodies protects them from witchcraft attacks and other abuses. For example, there is a strong belief among the Ngonde that witches can "play" with one's body whilst one is sleeping.²¹⁸ They can use their victim as football, netball, or for farming (working in somebody's garden), and doing any manual work. Sometimes, the witches can take you to unknown places through magic to sell you to prospective customers. If the customer is satisfied, your death is imminent.

²¹⁶ Rhodian Munyenembe reports that during an infant-dedication service at Zambezi Evangelical Church, Mr. J. Phiri was seen checking the children's necks and cutting the necklaces that the children were wearing with the argument that the necklaces compromised the parents' trust in the God of their faith. Rhodian Munyenembe, *Christianity and Socio-cultural Issues: The Charismatic Movement and Contextualization in Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2011, p. 79.

²¹⁷ Int. Florence Sikwamba (not her real name), Karonga Living Waters Church, 20.3.2012.

²¹⁸ Duncan Ross Mackenzie, *The Spirit Ridden Konde*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, (otherwise, London: Seeley), 1925, pp. 255, 259.

Body fortification is also important to protect one from illnesses that are caused by witchcraft. People who hate you will not succeed in harming you if they meet the same powers in you; the powers in you will repel the powers from the witch, unless the *ng'anga* did not use powerful medicines to protect you. Some husbands fortify their wives in order that they should not sleep with other men.²¹⁹ This is mostly done without the wife's knowledge. Many Christians that I interviewed accepted having their bodies fortified²²⁰ when they were staying in their parent's houses. The commonest way that is used to fortify the body is to have incisions made on their bodies and then powdered medicine is applied. Some do carry charms²²¹ and wear them as bracelets around the neck, waist, and ankle and in other places.²²² The important aim of the process is to have some bodyguards in the body that will fight any witchcraft attacks targeted on them.

One Christian, a member of Assemblies of God, informed me that before he became 'born again', he went to a *nchimi* in Chitipa to have his body protected against witchcraft attacks. The *nchimi* made incisions on his body and rubbed in some medicine. He was then taken to a room full of darkness and was asked to take off all his clothes. The *nchimi* warned him that he was not going to have a pleasant experience but he should be courageous. He stayed there for twenty minutes or more, he was not sure. Certain

²¹⁹ Different ways have been suggested. One of the ways is where the man gets some traditional medicine from a traditional healer who advises him to use it with a knife locally called *okapi*. The husband then puts the knife, unfolded, on the table. The unsuspecting wife finds the knife and fearing that it may hurt the children, folds it back. The moment she closes it, she is fortified. *Ng'anga* fortify women by getting the woman's used sanitary pad and mixing it with herbs from trees such as *mukotama* and *muwuluka*, and a rotten egg. After *kuthemberezga* (making an oath), they place them in a bottle and close it. Int. *Nchimi* Suzika, 18.3.2012.

²²⁰ This is mostly done by a traditional healer. He makes incisions on different parts of the body and rubs in powdered medicine. Some are given charms which they carry either in their pockets or keep in certain parts of their houses, gardens, office or whatever it is they want to protect.

²²¹ On a lighter note, they put a piece of charcoal or a cassava plant stem in their pockets or on the chest inside their clothes to protect themselves from witches when they are walking to other places. Pieces of charcoal are also placed in containers of maize flour, or on the mats on which the flour is placed to dry. The charcoal and the cassava stem are believed to have power that neutralizes witchcraft.

²²² Int. Harvey Mwakalenga, Kafikisila Village, 5.3.2011.

insects bit him all over his body. This was part of the process of fortification. After that, he was given a silver ring which he used to wear, that warned him when anyone was attempting to harm him through witchcraft. He was told that if he felt the ring burning his skin, that was the sign. When he became born again, he threw away the ring, and the protective medicine that he was keeping in his house. He was prayed for to deliver him from whatever was placed in his body by the *nchimi* and he is happy that he is free. He said that although he was a Christian, he was not deep rooted. He did not know what he was doing. This is a clear case of dualism.

House Fortification

Closely related to body fortification is house fortification which blocks witches from coming into the house to harm the occupants or take them to wherever they want to take them. Traditional healers tell those who come to them for such kind of medicine that the witches will not see the way, or they will see fire and retreat, or they will see a big body of water, they will not find where they are sleeping. One of the interviewees, an elder in the Last Church, explained how he got his house fortified. He went to Chitipa²²³ where he consulted a *nchimi* who was an expert in house fortification. The diviner told him that he had to go with him to his house because he does not do it from a distance. The *nchimi* brought his tool box with him in which there was a mixture of traditional medicines, some of which were placed in bottles. The diviner did not tell the informant everything he had in his box, but one thing he mentioned that was powerful for his house protection was bile of a crocodile. When they both arrived at his house, they waited for darkness to fall before he could perform his assignment. Probably he did not want people to see what they were about to do. The diviner requested for a broom which he used to sprinkle medicated water on all the corners of the house, both inside and outside and on the inside of the roof. This was done because it is believed that witches enter the houses through the corners or the roof and not the doors. After that, he asked for the main bedroom, and dug a hole in the floor using a sharp metal and buried something there. He told his client to walk round the house four times,

²²³ Several respondents mention Chitipa as the place they went to consult a *nchimi*, or they invited a *nchimi* from there. It is important to note that *nchimi* from Chitipa are considered to be more powerful than those from Karonga.

naked²²⁴ saying "*mulosi linga akwisa afulale*" (if a witch comes here, he or she should be hurt).

He did this while he was a respected church elder. He said that this was necessary because they were not sleeping at night as they were being disturbed in their sleep by what they believed to be witches and wizards. He and his family members were having bad dreams at night, and at a certain time he dreamt that someone was giving him medicine in his sleep, and the next day he fell very ill and nearly died; that is why he had to see the diviner. In the interview I had with him, he appeared not to have any problems with what he did because he was safeguarding his life. He argued that God would be pleased to see that he found a better way of protecting his house and his family from further harm. When I asked him how he feels as a Christian about his statement that if a witch comes it should be hurt, he said that witches are evil and they should be punished for their evil deeds. This presents a situation where dual religiosity is practised, with no regrets whatsoever.

Another story was shared by a member of the Presbyterian Church, who explained that he was compelled to have his house fortified. This followed the experiences he and his family had when he built a house and after completion he and his family could hardly undress in the house. Whenever any of the members would undress either to change clothes or to sleep, a group of people (perhaps a mixture of male and female voices) from an unknown source, would begin laughing at them. When it happened for the first time, his wife was frightened, fled out of the house to the outside kitchen naked because she did not understand what was happening. The wife explained that people who saw her running out of the house naked thought that she was mentally disturbed but when she explained, they understood. The husband, who was outside the house relaxing in the shade of a mango tree, could not believe the story. The wife encouraged him to go into the house and try to remove his clothes in the bedroom. The man took off all his clothes and as soon as he finished, the voices started laughing again. The man put on his clothes, and knew that something was wrong and that he had to see a diviner to deal with the problem. The diviner explained

²²⁴ There seems to be a relationship between walking naked in the process of fortifying the house and the way the witches carry out their work. It is believed that they do it while naked. See D.R. Mackenzie, D.R. Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 259, and J.W.M. van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2001, p. 213. Breugel reports that the Chewa call witches *a maliseche* because they go about naked at night.

that, originally, there were some graves where his house was built so he would do something to stop the spirits from causing havoc in the house. The diviner requested that the man should bring a white chicken which he used in the ritual to ward off the spirits. The diviner invited all family members and took the chicken and reeled it around each person's head. He cut the chicken on the throat and drained the blood into a clay pot. He mixed the blood with traditional medicine and poured the mixture into all the corners of the house. Then the diviner asked the family members to leave him alone in the house, and the husband does not really know what the diviner did when he was alone. However, he thinks that it is very likely that the diviner tried to undress to find out if what he had done would work. When he came out, he assured them that what they experienced would not happen again. True to his word, the laughing disappeared.

From the story above, it is clear that the husband is a Christian who is a regular churchgoer, in good standing with the church, but when faced with this crisis, he rushed to a diviner for assistance. When asked why he did not rush to the pastor so that he could assist through prayers, he pointed out that his pastor could not have handled the case because it was complicated. He jokingly remarked that the pastor would have run away. The church leader was fully aware that he was not expected to consult a diviner as a Christian, but felt that what he did was the only way out, and he had to do it only this time. He emphasized that he does not consult diviners often but only in special cases. This is a case of occasional dual religiosity.

Business and Position Fortification

Traditional medicine is also used in business both for protection and prosperity. Business needs protection because there are people who are thought to steal money through magic. Prosperity comes in many different ways. There are some who are believed to own snakes or rats, or different kinds of animals²²⁵ which are sent to shops or houses to steal money. Some use medicated money to steal from others in a process called "*chitaka*." The one with medicated money will use it to buy something from a shop, and when the shop owner receives the money, the customer hurries home. The shop owner's money will then turn into useless papers and they will not be

²²⁵ Generally, Africans believe that witches could change to animals such as rats, snakes, cats, bat, owl etc. Emakpor Ogo, "Witchcraft in African Traditional Religion," www.shvoong.com/humanities/religion-studies/83-witchcraft-african-traditional-religion (18.2.2013). In Malawi, it is widely believed that individuals can own rats or snakes which they use through magic to get what they want.

able to locate the customer. Another way in which *chitaka* works is that some people who have a particular medicine in their bodies (*bopanda*) brush their shoulders with their target; if the victim has money in his or her pockets, the money is transferred to them and what the victim finds in his or her pockets are papers. Furthermore, some people claim that they get medicine that makes money return to them after paying for a certain service or item.

Businessmen and women use *ndondosha/majini*²²⁶ to prosper. One hears of *majini* being placed in the maize mill²²⁷ for it to run and attract many customers. Christians are not spared from all this. I talked to a Seventh-day Adventist lady who was in 2010 accused of keeping *ndondosha* in her home. She owns a grocery in the village and she was accused of practicing witchcraft. In 2010, she lost her nephew. She had one room in her house which was kept locked all the time, and her children wondered what was there. When one of the children asked her she told him not to ask that question again. One day, when she was away to another town, the son decided to open the room because he was curious to see what was in there. He asked a carpenter to assist him to open the room. When he opened the room, they found the boy, his mother's nephew who had passed away a few months before, standing in the corner of the house. They closed the door and ran away, shaking. The son told the carpenter to put the lock on, and warned him not to tell anyone. But the carpenter could not keep the secret for long. The lady explained that she was called back from town to attend to an urgent issue. She accepted responsibility for killing the nephew through witchcraft. She did it so that her business would be successful by attracting many customers. When I asked her how that relates to her Christian faith, she explained that it was wrong. However, since she is living in a competitive world, she needed to find the means for her business to survive. Her business collapsed a few months after a *nchimi* was invited to completely kill the boy using traditional medicines. She was suspended

²²⁶ *Ndondosha* are people who are killed through magic and are brought back to life to serve different purposes.

²²⁷ Among the Chewa there is a wide belief that the owner of a maize mill puts a person in the engine of the mill in order for it to run properly. J.W.M. van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2001, p. 226. While such cases are without proof, people's perceptions still stand.

from the church for a period of six months.²²⁸ The story shows that the lady practices dual religiosity in order for her business to prosper.

Anne shared a story about her father who is secretary of a Roman Catholic parish. He has a strong belief in witchcraft and visits *ng'anga* often. He does that to make sure that he is protected from witchcraft attacks. Anne claims that her father goes to a *ng'anga* to get some medicines so that he should not be removed from his position in the church. Her father has been in that position for many years and believes that it is because of the charms he gets from the traditional doctor. There was a point when members of the family thought that was the turning point of his life. However, this moment was short-lived. He got very sick and was near death. He stayed in hospital for a number of days with no improvement. His wife invited Christians to pray for him. After prayers were offered for him, he got healed and 'believed' in Jesus Christ, but continues to visit traditional healers. His wife keeps on throwing away protective traditional medicines and charms that the husband brings to the house.

Connected to business and position fortification is the issue of seeking employment. There are many who consult traditional healers in order to be employed. Two pastors testified that they consulted *ng'anga* before they knew the 'truth', in search of employment and promotion. One of them stated that his consultation bore fruits because he got employed after the administration of the medicine that he was given. Both pastors, who were interviewed separately, mentioned that their visits to a *ng'anga* help them to understand Christians who consult *ng'anga* so that they can minister to them better.²²⁹ The case of the two pastors does not account for dual religiosity in their present state, because they now know and teach against the elements of African Traditional Religion. Nevertheless, dual religiosity can still be seen retrospectively, because they were already members of the churches they are pastoring now.

²²⁸ The suspension was not a punishment for killing the nephew, but for putting her and the church into disrepute due to the news that spread all over the place.

²²⁹ One was from the Moravian Church and another one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi.

Marriage Fortification

Among the Ngonde, just like in other societies, marriage fortification is commonly done by women²³⁰ because they feel insecure in marriage and are often oppressed by their husbands. This could be partly due to the fact that Ngonde is a patrilineal society. The fortification is carried out by obtaining love potions (*temwanene*)²³¹ usually from herbalists, although some diviners also provide them. The love potions come in various forms and they are utilized for various reasons. These forms include:

Mulilira

Mulilira is derived from the root word "*lira*" which means "to cry." *Mulilira* is the type of love potion that is obtained from a tree known as *mulilira* which always exudes some liquid. The love potion is utilized with the aim of making the husband love only the wife and not other women. The husband will be thinking and talking about his wife wherever he is, and he may not see other women as attractive, but his wife only. He will always be missing her when he is away from her.

The woman gets the barks of the *mulilira* tree and then makes powder out of it. The powder is sprinkled in any kind of food such as relish, *nsima* (Malawi's staple food) or any beverages. While sprinkling she must speak some words (*kulumbirira*) "*Undilire yuyune, ungane yone, no kwinong'ona uyungi umwanakasi.*" ("You should be crying for me, love only me, don't think of another woman"). The rule is that the wife must take that meal with the husband for it to take effect. Following that, the husband will love his wife only, and sometimes the husband may follow the wife wherever she is or goes.

Benga Bakamu

This type of love potion is given to the husband by the wife so that the husband should not think about his relatives. *Benga bakamu* literally means "hate [your] relatives." The love potion is also applied to any type of food a woman may prepare, and it is meant to close out the heart of the husband to any thoughts about assisting his relatives. Being a patrilineal society, the husband is responsible for his family members such as parents, brothers and sisters who may need help. Since daughters are married off, parents do

²³⁰ This is not to say that men do not use love potions. Stories are told of men who move around with charms to win love from women. In this section, the focus has been on how women fortify their marriages.

²³¹ This is a Chitumbuka term which the Ngonde also use; otherwise the Kyangonde translation is *ungane une*.

not really count them as theirs, because they will be under the umbrella of the husband's family, so they expect very little help to come from her. Sons are actually charged with responsibility to take care of aging parents especially if they are needy. So if the love potion works, the husband will not give any assistance²³² to his family (parents, uncles, aunts, brothers or sisters etc.), so that his wife will have a bigger share of her husband's resources and can even send some to her relatives.

Chisheshe

This type of love potion is obtained from traditional healers. The herbs are mixed with mud that was used to smear the floor of the house. When that is done, the husband will not leave the house, *osheshetuka munyumba* (which means he will be moving about in the house). This is mostly done to husbands who always go out to drink and sleep with other women, leaving the wife at home, and come home at dawn. The wives administer the love potion to keep the husband around.

Nkota wa Uta

This kind of medicine is presented in form of a medicated string which is tied to two pieces of sticks, sort of a catapult. *Uta* means "bow," but what is made does not look like a bow. In the past what was made was a bow, but now it is made differently although the name has been retained. This type of medicine works like this: when the string is tied tightly, creating tension between the two sticks, the husband will be able to perform sexually, but when it is loosened, he will not be able to perform since he will not be able to attain an erection. So what the wife does is that when the husband is out of the home, she slackens the string, but when he comes home, she tightens it for her sake. The danger of this kind of love potion is that once the string is lost while it is slackened the husband will never attain an erection again. It is believed that no traditional treatment can heal him.

Njenje

Some women obtain love potion in form of pieces of wood which are extracted from a tree known as *njenje*. The pieces of wood are soaked in water for a day. The medicated water is then mixed with bathing water which is given to the husband. Once the husband takes the bath, it is believed, his love for his wife will increase.

²³² The assistance could be financial or material as the case might be.

Mubilikira

This is the only love potion that is administered while the husband is far away from home (*mtchona*). *Mubilikira* is derived from the root word *bilikira* which means "to call." There are some husbands who go to other countries such as Tanzania to seek employment and forget that they left their wives back home in Malawi. Some may even marry another woman in the foreign country. A woman may consult a *ng'anga* who provides some traditional medicine which is then rolled in a piece of paper like a cigarette. The woman lights this 'cigarette' and then smokes it (*okwesa ngati ngambo*).²³³ When she is smoking, the husband will not be at peace wherever he is (*indumbula yikuya mmwanya*). He will leave immediately and come home to his wife, regardless of whether he was married to another woman or not.

Mnogha

This love potion is placed in the vagina so that the wife can taste sweet during sexual intercourse, and once a man sleeps with her he will not desire any other woman any more. *Mnogha* means "sweet" and the name of the medicine is derived from that. Just like salt makes food taste nice, the medicine makes sex taste nice. A woman will use this kind of medicine to stop the husband from sleeping with other women. It must be noted that *mnogha* is not used by married women only; sex workers use it too, so that they can attract many customers.

Other Medicines

The last category comprises medicines that are mixed with lotion which a woman applies on her face and the whole body. The face shines, and when a man looks at her, he desires her. Another kind of medicine is presented in form of powder and then incisions are made on the various parts of the woman's body. The powder is then rubbed into those incisions. All these are used with the aim of winning a man's love and making marriage strong.

Some Christian women use love potions due to circumstances they find themselves in, while others obtain the love potions as a preventive measure, so that their husbands should not look for love elsewhere.²³⁴

²³³ This should be looked at as a form of magic, otherwise there appears to be no connection between the smoking and the husband's coming home. It is difficult to understand how this kind of medicine works where there is no physical contact.

²³⁴ One of the basic needs of women is love and women try all they can to obtain it from their husbands; ranging from traditional medicine, cooking, personal

Tamara narrated that her husband was a drunkard and in addition, he married two other women. His love for her diminished and he used to spend more time with the other women. Tamara then thought of seeking help from traditional healers to win back the love of her husband. She consulted several of them after noticing that the love potion from the previous traditional healer did not yield the expected results. One of them gave her some powdered stuff to put in his relish. She was promised that she would see a change in her husband within three weeks. She gave the herbalist the benefit of doubt and waited for three months, to no avail. Then Tamara consulted another *ng'anga* that made some incisions on her body and applied black stuff on the incisions. The incisions were made on her hands, breasts, thighs, calves and the pubic area. These are associated with sexual activity, and would therefore attract the husband to spend more time with her. This worked well for five months. The husband lived with her for most of the time and displayed great love for her. In the sixth month, he slipped back to the old habits.

She then consulted a diviner who gave her the tail of a lizard, mixed with some herbs which she administered to the husband again, through relish. The diviner assured her that it would work because he had never failed. The husband would behave like a lizard which sticks to the wall at all times, implying that the husband would stick to her. When she gave the medicine to her husband in his favourite meal, the husband changed completely and he divorced the two women within the space of one year. Tamara now takes care of the two children that the divorced women left behind. She is a member of Christian Love Church and she pointed out that she resorted to consulting traditional healers after two years of prayer and fasting, which yielded no tangible results.²³⁵

The second case is that of Naswila who was giving birth to girls only. When she gave birth to a fifth baby girl, the husband expressed disappointment and married another wife with the hope that she would give birth to boys. The two wives lived together in peace for the first two years during which the second wife gave birth to a baby girl. This worked to the advantage of Naswila, because at this point, the second wife was not any better than her.

grooming, etc. Some husbands love naturally, and when other women see such a loving husband they tend to wonder what kind of medicine he was given. Several Christian women have asked me to which traditional healer I went for my husband to love me the way he does, encouraging and supporting me to study up to postgraduate level.

²³⁵

Int. Tamara Mwamsamale (not real, Simoni Village, 11.3.2012.

But trouble started when she gave birth to the second child who was a boy. Her husband moved out of her house to stay in that of the second wife. Naswila therefore went to a *ng'anga* to bring her husband back to her house. She was given two kinds of medicine. The first was to be mixed with her lotion which she used to apply to her body after taking a shower. She was to apply the mixture on her face and her pubic area while speaking the following words, "*Mulume wangu we usobile, mulume wangu ngulonda wise ku nyumba yako, ku buyo bwako*" ("My husband you are lost, I want you come back home, to your place"). The second kind of medicine was to be placed in the water that he would bathe in. The only challenge was that the husband had moved to the house of the second wife and therefore there was no way he could take a shower at her house. Since the houses were not very far from each other, she offered to assist her friend under the pretext that she had a small baby. She did administer the medicine the day she was allowed to give her run-away husband some bathing water. Once he took a bath, the man fell in love with his first wife for the second time! He started being nice to her once again, although he did not divorce the second wife. The husband started spending nights in her house as well. Naswila is a member of the New Apostolic Church and defended her actions by saying that the church allows members to use traditional medicine, but the church is against consulting diviners.²³⁶

The stories that the two women shared confirm that some Christian women use traditional means to strengthen their marriages (*kwikasya nyegha*) and to win back their husband's love lost to other women. Obtaining love potions may not qualify as dual religiosity because they are commonly acquired from herbalists, except in cases where a *nchimi* is consulted. I interviewed twenty-five women, and only two indicated that they went to a diviner to have their problems sorted out.²³⁷

Reproductive Medicine

Reproductive medicine is sought for different purposes. Infertile men or women do seek the services of *nchimi* to bear children. F2, who is a

²³⁶ The church leader did indicate that getting medicine from herbalists is not prohibited, but diviners are in a category of their own and must not be entertained. Int. McLeod Gondwe, Community Evangelist, New Apostolic Faith Church, 14.3.2012.

²³⁷ One of the two stated that she wanted the love potion that needed to be administered not physically but 'magically' (*kumaere*). This had to do with the husband's sexual organs so that they should function only when her husband is with her, but not with other women.

committed Christian of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, told me that when she got married she could not have a child for two years. She was then advised by her close friends to see a *nchimi* to get assistance. She went to a *nchimi* who told her, through a divination session, that a witch had 'tied' her womb (*kupinya mphapo*) so that she should not have children, and that her husband should divorce her for barrenness. The witch was just jealous of F2.²³⁸ The *nchimi* gave her medicine which she took orally for thirty days, to untie the womb. She and her husband were not allowed to have any sexual relations for those days. At the expiry of thirty days the two were to report to the *nchimi* who made incisions on the pubic area of both of them and rubbed in some powdered medicine. He took them to a room which had a mat on which a white cloth marked with a red cross was spread.²³⁹ He instructed them to have sex in there. The *nchimi* uttered a few unintelligible words which F2 thinks were a blessing, and then left the room. F2 believes that she conceived that very same day because she never experienced any menses until she had her first born. She is a mother of seven children; the first and the last were born through the treatment that was provided by the diviner.

F2 shared about her spiritual struggles because now she is 'born again' and she has been told that the two children (the first and the last) are not from God but from the devil, because of the way she got them. The children are now grown up; one is 42 and the other 27. She regrets that she consulted a *nchimi* because as nominal Christians she and her husband did not recognize that it was 'sin', but at the same time she is glad that she did it because

²³⁸ It is interesting to note that the diviner did not name the witch, and neither did the woman and the husband try to find out. In most cases victims consult *nchimi* specifically for that purpose. There is a distinction between "the witches" or "a witch" and a witch named. This could be interpreted as one way the *ng'anga* used to convince the clients that there was a problem (he just had to say something even though he was not sure, he had to say something that they wanted to hear). Just giving them medicine without making reference to witchcraft would make the *nchimi* a failure because that's what his clients suspected anyway. The fact that the *nchimi* did not name any person as a witch shows that the case was not seen as a result of witchcraft.

²³⁹ The symbol of the red cross plays a major role in several rituals both Christian and non-Christian. It means different things in different contexts. In Christianity red stands for the blood of Jesus Christ which washes away all sin, and that is what it means for the Zionists, cf. Ulf Strohehn, *The Zionist Churches in Malawi: History – Theology – Anthropology*, PhD, University of Malawi, 2010. The cross is sometimes associated with salvation and healing.

the experience she had at the *nchimi*'s place opened her womb for her to have children.

Nchimi are also believed to have the ability to change the sex of children that a couple can have using their magic. Namukubayila has five children, three girls and two boys. Her husband expressed dissatisfaction when he heard that his wife had a third baby girl and did not even go to the hospital to see her because he wanted a boy this time. He started a search for a second wife with the hope that she will give him boys. When Namukubayila heard this, she discussed with her husband that they should see a *nchimi* whom she thought would be able to 'turn' the birth pattern (*kung'anamula mphapo*) so that she could have boys. Although both of them are Christians of the Anglican Church, they consulted a *nchimi* who helped them.²⁴⁰ The next two children were boys. When I inquired what they think about this in relation to their faith, they saw no problem, although the Anglican Church does not approve any consultation of spiritual mediums.²⁴¹ What matters to them is that they now have sons and they believe that God used the *nchimi* to meet their hearts' desire.

A pastor of a neo-charismatic church shared his struggles to have children when he got married. At this point he was a Christian but not "born again". He lived with his wife for three years without any child. He then decided to take his wife to a *ng'anga*, but three years passed before they could see any results. When he became "born again", prayers were made for him and his wife. Following those prayers, in his sleep he heard a voice speaking (and he believes that it was God speaking) telling him that his wife would have a son, but the son would not live long. The wife indeed gave birth to a son who died at nine months. That son is the one that opened his wife's womb. They have nine children now.²⁴² People therefore consult traditional healers to seek help when there is a threat of infertility, and in that way they participate in dual religiosity, especially when divination is employed in the process.

Summary

From the different cases above, it is obvious that some Christians of different denominations do turn to herbalists and *nchimi* when they are faced with sudden or protracted illness. The manner in which the illness

²⁴⁰ The interviewee was not free to explain what was done and how the two were helped.

²⁴¹ Int. Rev. L. Mtekatoka, St Ambrose Anglican Church, 14.3.2012.

²⁴² Int. name withheld, n.d.

begins also matters. Some do seek medical help but eventually end up in the traditional healer's place as the last resort. So, it would not be correct to say that the Ngonde rush to a traditional healer when sick. However, there are conditions that lead to that situation, like sudden illness that results from suspicious occasions like arguments, favouritism, jealousy, etc. In one of the cases, there is a combination of two types of medicines, traditional and bio-medical. When the medical assistant was in hospital, the brother brought him medicine from a traditional healer, so the two medicines were used concurrently. Another thing that is evident is that some would be taken to a traditional healer at the request of others. The patient is helpless and the others make decisions for him. The patient also hopes that some help will come his way through traditional healing.

I also noted that Christians who are educated still go to traditional healers but they choose what they want to believe in and what not to believe in. They tend to have doubts in what the healers say and do brush aside some of the ideas. However, they still allow the healer to perform some 'traditional' operation on them even when they do not really understand and agree with what he is doing. Traditional healers/diviners are the only source of help in a life experience filled with witchcraft activities that people live in fear of. The *nchimi* has a special relationship with *imbepo mbibi* (evil spirits) and all other supernatural beings that society needs to deal with, with the ever present consequence of being bewitched. It is noteworthy that when people go to consult a diviner, they want to know who caused the sickness and at times, one might be asked if they want to revenge. If they accept, the *nchimi* harms the one who is suspected of causing the illness or even kills him.²⁴³ The healing knowledge is usually taught by a being from the spirit world.²⁴⁴ It can be said therefore that many Ngonde Christians do solve their problems sometimes through traditional means, and some of these means include elements of Traditional Religions.

²⁴³ The *nchimi* who uses a mirror in his divination, brings up the image of the suspect in the mirror, then he will poke the image in the place you want the enemy harmed. If you want him to die, he will poke at the heart.

²⁴⁴ Seventy-five percent of the traditional healers, especially diviners, explained that they died and came back to life for them to begin their work. The spirits also guide and show the type of medicine to give to their clients. Most of them owe their beginnings to dreams in which they died. Malidoma P. Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual and Community*, New York: Penguin, 1998, p. 81.

What is evident is that people move back and forth when sickness persists. This is also observed by Joseph DeGabriele in his study among the Chewa and the Yao:

In Malawi people easily change over from one health care system to another and back again without feeling that they are being inconsistent ... These decisions regarding which type of therapy to go for depends as much on accessibility of suitable medical care (in terms of affordability and distance) as well as diagnosis of what the cause is. ... in home based care, the relatives of the sick person make most of the important decisions, increasingly so as the illness progresses, regarding which system to consult, and who to consult.²⁴⁵

This is also true about the Ngonde as discussed in the case studies above. Apart from illness, some Christians also consulted herbalists or *nchimi* to get protective and reproductive medicine. This happened when their security was threatened.

Further, while some Christians did not see any conflict between their faith and their involvement in divination, others did express that they struggled in their hearts because they realized that what they were doing was not right. However, they still proceeded due to the circumstances they were in. This implies that their moral decisions were not guided by their faith but that they allowed the situation dictate on how they should act.

Christians and Ancestors (Misyuka)

Misyuka Taking Care of People²⁴⁶

Some Christians participate in occasional dual religiosity through their relationships with ancestors and how they live out that relationship. Ancestors are mentioned when one is being blessed, when travelling, when

²⁴⁵ Joseph DeGabriele, "When Pills don't Work - African Illnesses, Misfortune and Mdulo," *Religion in Malawi* No. 9, 1999, pp. 9-23.

²⁴⁶ Among the Ngonde, *misyuka* are believed to interact with people when it becomes necessary. It is believed that *misyuka* can call a person by his or her name without making themselves seen. When *misyuka* are nearby the hairs seem to stand on end of the head. When one is at a graveyard or in the mountains the noise of a branch being broken would indicate the action of *misyuka*. People believe that *misyuka* can greet (people actually hear the voice) but not be seen by the one they greet. My mother had on several occasions heard her long dead brother and mother separately say things out loud but she could not see them. This of course may have a psychological explanation. It could happen if she spends a lot of time reflecting and thinking about them.

one is about to sleep, during times of illness, among other occasions. They are believed to bring luck. This explains why some do turn to them when they cannot find employment or when things do not work for them. In addition, when strange things happen in the lives of individuals, many find it necessary to consult ancestors at family level. A chain of misfortunes could be interpreted as a sign that the ancestors are not happy. There are times when elders put some water into the mouth and spit it on the one being blessed, while mentioning the names of ancestors. Also, when people are travelling and are facing some danger like an accident, they do call upon the name of the ancestral spirits.

Case 1: A pastor's wife shared an experience she and a choir group from a Presbyterian church had in October 2010 as they travelled to another town. As they were travelling, the driver of their vehicle was unable to see in front because there was a thick smoke from burning grass. The driver was afraid to pass through the smoke for fear of burning the vehicle. A choir member shouted on top of her voice calling upon *misyuka* (ancestral spirits) to help, "*Misyuka ya batata, tuhobokera twebana bako, tupoka!*" ("Spirits of our fathers, please forgive us, save us!") The driver drove through the thick cloud safely, without judging whether this was possible because of the prayer to the spirits. So, some Christians do look to the ancestors for protection.

Case 2: Papapa shared a story of her uncle who died in 2008. The uncle had a son who was living in Blantyre, a member of Living Waters Church. When his father died, he came to the village for burial and went back to Blantyre, just like everybody else who attended the funeral. Since his father had a lot of cattle, he went back to the village, sold the cattle without any elder's permission, and took all the money with him to Blantyre. While in Blantyre, he faced several misfortunes, and things became chaotic for him: he was involved in an accident and was in hospital for a month; his property was stolen after thieves broke into his house, and the money that he earned from selling the cattle in the village was lost mysteriously and he could not explain how it happened. When the news reached the elders back in the village, he was invited home where he was taken to his father's grave to be prayed for (*kulumbirira*) and to receive a *lusayo* (blessing). This was necessary because it was believed that *misyuka yikalele* (the spirits were angry) because of his behaviour. He needed to apologize to the dead father who was supposedly angry with him. An elder made a simple prayer while they were in a kneeling position, "*mwe batata, mupeko lusayo mwana wako, muhobokere.*" After this ceremony, things normalized in his life.

Case 3: Mwalilino's brother passed away and left several pieces of land for cultivation. His late brother's children were the apparent heirs of the land but he decided to sell some of the land, and took the remaining part himself. When he went to till the land, a large group of *misyuka*²⁴⁷ came and he ran away. He not only saw the owner of the land, but also other ancestors. This happened each time he went to till the land and he finally gave up cultivating the land. His wife and children refused to till the land after learning from him what he experienced. In addition, his son started fainting mysteriously. He would take him to hospital, but he could not be healed he would take him to a *ng'anga*, but there would be no improvement. He finally took the son for prayers at a fellowship and he is now feeling well. Mwalilino is a Baptist.

Case 4: Harold, a Roman Catholic was well educated but was out of employment for a long time. His mother was very concerned about this and she suspected that the ancestors were responsible for his misfortune. Harold's grandmother had passed away but he did not attend the funeral. His mother felt that his late grandmother was angry with him because she loved him so much and yet he did not attend her funeral. Following this, the mother suggested that Harold should go to the village and visit his grandmother's grave and apologize for not attending the funeral so that he could be relieved of the problem of unemployment he was facing. Since Harold is educated and a Christian, he refused and asked his mother to do it on his behalf. The mother took the task seriously and went to the village to perform the small ritual on behalf of her son. Harold is not sure whether that ritual worked. His mother strongly believes that her son is now employed because of what she did in the village and reminds her son that he must be thankful.

Case 5: Lingford's mother died while he was in college. He went home and attended her funeral. When he came back to college, his late mother kept coming to him in his dreams. This would happen again and again and it was disturbing him so much that he could not rest properly. He shared this with his father who arranged for a ritual to stop this from happening. He was told that it was dangerous to keep this happening because the mother may one day decide to take her son with her which could result in his death. Lingford travelled to the village on a week-end. His father and another elder took a piece of burning wood, some grass and some traditional medicine (*mbozga*) in a bowl of water. They went to the mother's grave and made

²⁴⁷ *Misyuka* are believed to put on a bodily form.

him bend over it, and put the burning wood on the grass a few centimeters above his head and poured the *mbozga* on it to put the fire out. So the water that fell on his head was that from the burning grass. The elder said some words to the spirit of his late mother to plead with her not to come to her son in dreams; to leave him alone. After performing that ritual, he stopped dreaming of his mother coming to him.

Lingford did this while he was an active Christian of a Presbyterian church. He said that he could not think of any better way of dealing with it. He actually asked me what I would have done if this was happening to me. What was important to him was to have the problem solved, and it was.

The cases above present occasional dual religiosity which is necessitated by circumstances which the Christians mentioned faced. Some were, of course, involved at the suggestion of others who appeared to know what should be done in order to have the problems solved.

Traditional Healers and Christian Faith

There is common belief that traditional healers are experts in witchcraft, otherwise they would not be able to counteract the witches. For diviners to provide a cure to an illness, they must know the type of illness, who or what caused the illness, and its remedy. For a diviner to know who caused it, he must somehow know how the sorcerers operate in order to undo what they have done. The popular saying 'send a thief to catch a thief' is regularly applied to traditional healers.

A traditional healer, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, is one of such healers who are thought to be *mulosi fiyo* (an advanced witch). He started his career in 1972 by following what his parents were doing and he learnt through observation, doing it with them. His knowledge also expanded as years went by learning from other *ng'anga*, especially from the Phoka area near Kondowe. He claims to heal a wide range of illnesses. He is not a diviner; he relies on the information that patients give him to prescribe treatment. He claimed that he is good at interpreting the information because he worked as a Health Surveillance Assistant for many years before he started his career in traditional healing.

When I asked him if there is any relationship between traditional healing and witchcraft, he was quick to mention that there are some healers who practice witchcraft, especially diviners. He claimed that he himself is not a

witch, but said that he possesses 'body guards'²⁴⁸ all over his body to protect himself from any witchcraft attacks. He does not believe that having protective medicine in his body is witchcraft. He argued that if that were the case, then many would be witches. He said that since he is involved in thwarting the wishes of the witches²⁴⁹ by giving his patients traditional medicine, the witches are not happy with him. Therefore they might do anything to harm him in retaliation. He sees himself as being at war with Satan and Satan is not happy with what is happening because the healer intercepts his work. Since he has strong guards in his body when the witches attack him and fail to achieve their objective, they think that he is more powerful than they are. He of course admitted that there are some traditional healers who don't bath, they look dirty, and wear beads all over and these are the ones who spoil their profession, and that is why people look at them as witches.

Another traditional healer (diviner), Ufyaghile, is a member of one Seventh-Day Adventist Church. She does not go to church, but pays her tithes. She does not go to church for two reasons. First, the church is full of sinners so she is afraid that she may go there and begin revealing the sins of the Christians because God shows her things that are hidden from others. She thinks she may become a stumbling block to others. Secondly, she is afraid of taking "bad breath" (*mbepo mbibi*) from the church and two spirits could be fighting within her. Asked as to whether she has any knowledge of witchcraft, she says she knows only what God reveals to her through the spirit. For instance, if someone who comes is evil in that he practices witchcraft, she is able to tell through her spirits. It is through the spirits that she knows that one has been bewitched because she sees everything clearly, including the home where one is coming from, the type of house and what is at his house.

²⁴⁸ Bodyguards refer to protective medicines that are in his body that fight off any attacks from witches. The guards are invisible.

²⁴⁹ This idea may raise some problems when distinguishing traditional healers from *nchimi*. Here the traditional healer is into all sorts of ATR elements even though he is not a *nchimi*. Even though traditional healing other than that which is obtained from *nchimi* is approved by many churches, there appears to be a thin line between the two. This is one of the reasons why Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches do not approve any traditional healing.

Yet another diviner, Suzika, has his own church at his compound where they meet on Sundays for worship and divination. The church does not have a name; he just calls



Figure 4: Inside Suzika's Church for Patients

it *Chalichi cha Babine* (church for the patients).²⁵⁰ He said that witchcraft and healing/ divination are inseparable. His task is to deal with witches, destroying their work. One must know their work first in order to destroy it fully. He cannot imagine doing the work without having the knowledge of witchcraft. However, he said that his knowledge of witchcraft is for a good reason because he wants to save lives. He does not use it to bring harm to people but to save them, while others use it with evil intentions.

Needs of the Community

Some Christians will get involved in elements of traditional religion due to the perceived needs of the community. Again great care must be taken here as to when one could be considered practicing dual religiosity without making a sweeping statement.

²⁵⁰ Some patients camp at his compound and are unable to attend church services which are quite a distance from his compound. The community built a church so that worship services could be held in there. I participated in one of the Sunday worship services. A wide selection of gospel hymns and choruses and non-gospel songs were sung. The *nchimi*, who claims to be the son of a former Presbyterian pastor, read from 1 Peter 2:1-5 and preached his sermon. In his preaching he made several references to Jesus' healing sprees because Jesus was a great *ng'anga*. He urged people to get rid of their sinful nature, for Jesus hates sin. An offering was taken and I was informed that it is used to help the patients who do not have money to buy food. Inside the church, there is a sign of the cross in front, and an inscription in Swahili, *Yesu ni Bwana*, which means Jesus is Lord. The same building was used for divination (*kusecha*) in the afternoon.

*Cleansing the Community of Witches and Charms (Kusecha)*²⁵¹

Witchcraft-cleansing is very common in the Ngonde area because belief in witchcraft is still very strong. Every community has its own ways of ridding its society of evil, because evil is not tolerated in a society. Of course, what is evil is agreed upon through consensus by every community. Witchcraft is strongly associated with evil and people live in fear of it. Some Christians do participate in dual religiosity in keeping with the needs of the community or for social reasons. Communal rituals are performed by everyone to show solidarity and they give identity to a group of people. Some do participate against their own wishes because they are compelled by circumstances beyond their control. One such ritual is the cleansing ritual commonly known as "kusecha" or "kutola nyanga," where the village is cleansed of all the witches and charms by a "witch-eradicator," to borrow Aylward Shorter's term.²⁵² The charms that are being searched for are those used to harm others. This ritual is carried out when the village headman observes a series of deaths and illnesses in the village, seen as resulting from the works of witchcraft. For instance, relatives of the dead person may go to see a *nchimi* when they suspect that their family member's death was caused by witchcraft. The *nchimi* may mention the names of those involved in bewitching the deceased and the *nchimi* writes a letter to the village head summoning those mentioned to go to the *nchimi's* compound to be rid of witchcraft. They are asked to bring all their charms with them to surrender to the *nchimi*. The *nchimi* puts a big cut on the forehead and applies some medicine on it. The big cut also acts as a sign to other people that the one who has a cut is a bad person and in a way helps him to restrain from practicing witchcraft again.²⁵³ In addition, the suspect is also warned not to

²⁵¹ *Kusecha* is popularly used and is borrowed from English "to search" and it means just that. *Kusecha* is also used to refer to the divining process (*bulaghusi*) where the *nchimi* is able to tell a person what he is suffering from, what happened for him to get sick, what will happen to him in future and other things.

²⁵² Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness*, New York: Orbis, 1985. See also J.C. Chakanza, "Provisional Annotated Chronological List of Witch-finding Movements in Malawi 1850-1980," *Journal of Africa*, Vol. 15/3 (1985), pp. 227-243.

²⁵³ Chikanga, a famous *nchimi* of the 1950s, did a similar thing to those who were believed to be practicing witchcraft. "All witches and wizards received big cuts on the forehead as a form of punishment so that everybody would be made aware of their status; but it would also act as an antidote against a relapse into witchcraft practices." Boston Soko, *Nchimi Chikanga: The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008, p. 70. The most popular song that people sang during such

touch the charms again and if he does he will face unspecified consequences.²⁵⁴ The same also happens when patients visit *nchimi* and names are given. What may begin as an individual problem/case turns out to involve the whole community. It is noteworthy that *nchimi* are best suited for this job as they are known to communicate with the spirits.

When a village headman decides to have his village cleansed, he sits down with his elders and then decides whom to invite to cleanse the village. When the *nchimi* comes he goes to the houses where he knows through his spiritual discernment that there are charms. He finds them in different places. In roofs of grass thatched houses, in corners of rooms in a house, some dig a hole in the house and bury them etc. He sometimes has to chase the *nyanga* which runs away at a terrific speed. Normally a *nchimi* brings a choir with him which sings as he carries out his assignment. Those who are found with charms must pay to the *nchimi* a fine, in some cases they are made to pay even a cow or money amounting to 20,000 MK.

The ritual puts Christians in a dilemma because they are members of the community in which they live and at the same time they are members of the Christian community. When the cleansing ritual is carried out, the village headman/woman requires that everyone participates regardless of whether they are Christians. Failure to participate may lead to being banished from the village. In addition, those who refuse to participate on account of being Christians are suspected of practicing witchcraft as they are thought to be using the church as a hiding bush.²⁵⁵ A good example that can be used here is what happened at one of CCAP churches in Karonga in 2010, where there was chaos over what could be termed a witch-cleansing ritual. Seventy-six members of the church were suspended for three months for allowing themselves to be searched by the diviner.

occasions was '*Pelekani pala muli nazo*,' which means "surrender your witchcraft tools if you have them," *ibid*, p. 65.

²⁵⁴ Some ran mad and others become paralyzed etc. According to Soko, death is a frequent consequence. Boston Soko, *Nchimi Chikanga: The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008, p. 70.

²⁵⁵ Aylward Shorter, in writing about a place called Mkombwe in Tanzania, observed that when a witch-eradicator was invited, the village headman announced that if anyone absented himself from the session it would be a sure sign that he or she practised witchcraft or sorcery. See his book *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness*, New York: Orbis, 1985, p. 165.

I shared a story about Patrick, a Medical Assistant at one of the Health Centres in Karonga, a member of the New Apostolic Church, and how he suffered and was later taken to the hospital, to a *ng'anga*, then back to hospital. The village headman explained that since the medical assistant was sick for a long time, he was on and off; his mother was persuaded to take him to a *ng'anga*. Following his sickness, the village headman decided to call his elders because the hospital is in his area, to discuss the way forward. They agreed to invite a *nchimi* to come and cleanse his village of witchcraft. It is common practice among the Ngonde to call *nchimi* to snatch charms from witches to stop them from practicing witchcraft. This decision was arrived at because the Medical Assistant's daughter had also been targeted by witches. She was sick for some time and it was alleged that she had been picked by witches at night to be taught witchcraft. The suspected witch was chased from the village but has since returned. This incident occurred in 2010.

Nchimi Mbale from Nthalire was invited to come and search the village but he was given exceptions. He was not to search the houses of hospital staff, teachers and other government employees, especially those who did not come originally from the village. The village headman was afraid of repercussions from the government. However, the clinic's building was searched and the *nchimi* found an owl perching on one of the planks on the roof.²⁵⁶ The village headman, a church elder, was in attendance, otherwise people would not come. The people were gathered in one place. The *nchimi* separated them one group on his left, another one on the right. The group on his left had various problems, ranging from illnesses to *bulosi* (witchcraft). The one on the right comprised people who were 'safe'. The 'searching exercise' went on for a couple of days and those guilty of practicing witchcraft or possessing charms were fined because it is very costly for a *nchimi* to find the charms. He searched all the houses that were suspected of having *nyanga*. He came all the way from Nthalire to catch them. The village headman did not know how much money the culprits were charged. Some refused to be searched because of their church doctrines, and were

²⁵⁶ An owl is a sign of bad omen. It is also believed that witches use it by sending it on various errands, and witches can turn into an owl and perform their duties disguised as owls. There are similar beliefs in Western Europe. In medieval Europe, owls were believed to be witches and wizards in disguise, and were still considered witches' companion, sharing unique spiritual communication between them, and even sharing the same secret powers of the night. "Owl Symbolism," www.macrameowl.com/owl-symbolism (18.2.2013).

treated as suspects. They were also threatened with banishment from the village. One person claimed that many of those who were found with charms were from CCAP and a few from other churches.²⁵⁷ Every effort to prevent Christians from being searched was interpreted as an attempt to challenge the authority of the chief and of trying to break down the village structure. After the search, one man was identified as being responsible for bewitching the Medical Assistant, but the Medical Assistant's family declined to pursue the issue further.

Some Christians form part of the audience out of curiosity. Others just want to see what the *nchimi* will do, as part of entertainment. Steven Kauta Msiska observed something similar about the Tumbuka:

I have been interested to find out real distinctions between them, which as yet I cannot. I am not saying that they are both bad or good, no, but that one cannot find any distinction of any kind except on Sundays when those who are baptized go to church for worship. But in burying the dead or in community engagements, or in marriage celebrations and dancing, even where the witchdoctors gather up people to search them, the majority of Christians are present.²⁵⁸

A random interview of the CCAP Christians who were involved in the search shows that individually, many did not have problems with being searched, except that their church did not approve of it. Some felt that it was not a sin to be 'searched', but being involved in witchcraft is.

Participation in Rain Calling Rituals

Rain-making is one of the communal rituals which have survived the ages among the Ngonde. This is one of the rituals which are directly linked to elements of Traditional Religion, because sacrifices and prayers are offered to God through the ancestral spirits. When the rains fail, the whole community, Christian and non-Christian, becomes affected because famine becomes imminent. While Christians are expected to seek redress through prayers to God, they also find themselves seeking the intervention of the ancestral spirits in their quest for the rains.²⁵⁹ The *chikungu* ritual is carried

²⁵⁷ There is no way to establish this claim.

²⁵⁸ Steven Kauta Msiska, *Golden Buttons: Christianity and Traditional Religion among the Tumbuka*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006, p. 27.

²⁵⁹ In his study among the Sukwa, Richard Gadama found that 75% of Christians he interviewed participate in rainmaking rituals, citing culture as one of the reasons. However, 15% rejected participation because they were born again Christians, and their church doctrine does not allow it. See Richard Gadama, *Women's Leadership*

out when there is a dry spell and the community wants to seek God's intervention to ward it off. While it is not compulsory for people to attend, people voluntarily join the group that goes to perform the ritual to show their solidarity, as part of culture; some genuinely go there to offer prayers because they believe that they have to do it and the ancestors must be appeased, some go for entertainment—to see what will happen there, some want to give moral support, some think it is something that they are obliged to do for the good of the community.

The 2008/09 rainy season in Karonga delayed and as a result arrangements were made for sacrifices and prayers to be offered to the ancestors. As usual, the area from Mwenilondo to Malungo put out their fires on the day of the ritual. An announcement was made in the villages to urge people to adhere to the tradition by not making fire in their homes. Some Christians who had had a conversion experience disobeyed the rule because they did not want to participate in pagan practices, but instead, organized prayers on the same day.²⁶⁰ A respected leader of the Karonga Old Mission CCAP was in the fore-front participating in the ritual to the amazement of many. This is in line with what Mwakasungula, writing on rainmaking among the Ngonde, pointed out: "some of the leaders in the church are also leaders in the rainmaking rituals. Members of the Christian community are also members of the society which is involved in these rituals and ceremonies."²⁶¹ Christians did not expect to see him taking such a leadership role during the *chikungu* ritual. When the ritual was over at Malungo, he distributed the new fire to the homes. In an interview I had with him, he was very critical of a pastor who strongly opposed the idea that Christians should participate in the *chikungu* ritual. A big conflict ensued between the pastor and the Christians and the higher body of that particular denomination intervened to pacify the conflicting camps. Many Christians felt that the pastor was being strict for nothing. The pastors who were in the area before him did not care about Christian participation in the

and Rainmaking Shrines among the Sukwa in Northern Malawi, MA Module, Mzuzu University, 2010.

²⁶⁰ Int. Violet Nyondo, Mwamatope Village, 19.11.2010. She is a born again Christian and did not participate in the Chikungu ritual. It rained the following day and those who participated in the ritual celebrated and praised their ancestors for hearing their prayers and forwarding them to God, while Born Again Christians who had prayed to God also celebrated. Violet said "it rained because the powers of the devil were defeated."

²⁶¹ Binnie Mwakasungula, *Rainmaking among the Ngonde in Northern Malawi*, BA, University of Malawi, 1999, p. 2.

ritual. Some Christians argued that when God answers prayers, through the ancestors, even the pastor and his family benefits from the rains. Many Christians from different churches participated in the ritual. However, what needs to be borne in mind is that the rainmaking rituals are religious in nature.

The current ritual leader of *chikungu* is a Roman Catholic. He leads the people in offering prayers and sacrifices at the graves at Lulindo, Chisindile and Malungo. He does not see any conflict between his role during the rainmaking ceremony and his Christian faith. He takes it as his service to the community, which God expects of him. He claimed that his church does not have problems with his role, because it has never raised any concerns with him.²⁶²

In the witch-cleansing exercise, we see Christians getting involved in the exercise at two levels: reluctant but compulsory involvement and voluntary involvement. Some were reluctant, not because they were convinced that it was wrong to get involved, but because the church might suspend them when it hears about it. Others refused to get involved because they believed that it was not in line with their Christian faith. This therefore may not be described as dual religiosity because Christians are making an effort not to subscribe to ATR elements. The village head, a church elder could be described as dual religious in that he is the custodian of culture and it is his social responsibility to protect the people of his village. He has to use the traditional means to rid the society of every evil. Members of his society expect him to do that, and he believes in those traditional means.

The *chikungu* ritual is also done to meet the needs of the community. Dual religiosity is demonstrated by many Christians across denominations, except that those who call themselves 'born agains' did not participate in the ritual labelling it as pagan and worship of idols. While attendance is expected of all villagers, people can choose not to participate. Those who

²⁶² Even though the ritual leader indicated that the church does not have problems with his involvement in the ritual, the church leadership stated that it does not allow its members to participate in such rituals. The Roman Catholic Church believes that the ritual involves offering prayers through the ancestral spirits and there is the danger of holding to these at the expense of Jesus Christ. The church recognizes only one intermediary, Jesus Christ. Int. Bishop Martin Mtumbuka, Karonga Diocese, 20.12.2012. This situation is an example of lack of understanding on the part of the ritual leader of what is acceptable in his church and what is not. This may also arise from the weakness of his local church where no one pointed it out to him to desist from doing that or to discipline him.

participate do so out of their own choice and for their own reasons if not simply as part of their Ngonde culture. From the story above, it can be gathered that involvement levels differ. The ritual leader and the prominent leader of the Presbyterian Church for example had no choice but to provide leadership and they did not see any problem with the ritual.

Funerals and Funeral Rituals

Many things that have religious connotations are done during funerals. For the Ngonde, just like for many Africans, funerals are taken as part of the process of sending the dead to the ancestors and as such various rituals are carried out. Ancestors give advice and instructions sometimes through dreams and visions. Their neglect causes misfortune, illness, hunger and death.²⁶³ The majority of funerals are full of accusations because it is believed that the deceased had been bewitched.²⁶⁴

After burial, on leaving the graveyard, all who attended the funeral wash their hands with water, including those who did not handle the coffin or the dead body. They do this to wash away the spirits or any 'bad air' from the dead person which might find its way to the living. They do everything possible to get rid of any trace of the dead person from their lives or their bodies. They ensure that there is clear separation between them and the dead. The shaving of hair (kumeta) is still done by some, but many have stopped due to the influence of Christianity. The church, through its teaching ministries, discourages its members from performing such practices, and this is one of the areas that it has succeeded to convince its adherents to stop.²⁶⁵ Today they simply perform a symbolic ritual of laying

²⁶³ Johannes Triebel, "Living together with Ancestors: Ancestor Veneration in Africa as a Challenge for Missiology," *Missiology*, XXX No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 188-189.

²⁶⁴ In the survey that Breugel made among the Chewa of central Malawi, 296 out of 451 cases of death were believed to have been caused by witchcraft, an indication that there was a great preoccupation with belief in witchcraft. See J.W.M. van Breugel, *Chewa Traditional Religion*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2001, p. 211. I have already given examples of deaths which were surrounded by witchcraft accusations and how they were handled, in the previous chapters.

²⁶⁵ Most Pentecostal and Charismatic churches teach that the Bible forbids people from shaving their hair because of the dead. Some of the leaders quoted Lev. 19:27-28, but verse 27 prohibits cutting the hair at the sides of one's head while verse 28 forbids cutting of bodies for the dead. Success in stopping people from shaving their hair following death of a loved one has also been achieved because it is easy to monitor, as such people are afraid of being caught. Additionally, the

the scissors on the hair near the forehead, without cutting it.²⁶⁶ Sometimes people are asked if they want to have their hair cut or not, but a woman whose husband has died has no choice but to shave.²⁶⁷

The Ngonde attribute illness and death to various agents and make every effort to discover those responsible. Even among Christians this mentality is still prevalent. In moments of crisis this deep-seated conviction, built up by centuries' old traditions, resurfaces. An atmosphere of fear and distrust is created which becomes particularly acute in circumstances such as a sudden and unexpected death, and many deaths occurring in a relatively short period. However, among Christians, differences are also evident, with those who profess to have a personal relationship with Christ having a different attitude towards that. These tend to blame such things on the devil, or just accept it as God's will. Further, this shows that there is occasional involvement in ATR elements, rather than dual religiosity. Occasional involvement becomes evident when a funeral occurs without which Christians may not be seen to be practicing it. This is because the crisis determines how one reacts to a situation.

Rituals of Chieftaincy

Those who are elected village headmen or chiefs are members of the community who participate in various spheres of life. Chieftainship is associated with many ATR beliefs and rituals and might be an aspect in which dualism is easily manifested by those who profess to be Christians. Chieftaincy and medicines are inseparable. The chiefs that I interviewed, including paramount chief Kyungu, are professing Christians of one denomination or the other and some of them did admit that they find difficulties to balance the needs of ATR and Christianity. Adherence to culture is very critical for the Ngonde. Although the chief may want to do away with the practices, some are considered to have a core function within the Ngonde culture so that they cannot be done away with. Since chiefs are custodians of culture, they must appear to their subjects to be the last persons to get rid of important elements of their culture.

change of attitude is due to modernity, where some people do not really see the relevance of such a ritual.

²⁶⁶ This is similar to what happens in some Christian initiation camps in southern Malawi where real circumcision does not take place but just an imitation, which could be described as symbolic. Patrick Makondesa, *Christian Initiation Rites in Southern Malawi*, MA Module, University of Malawi, 1999.

²⁶⁷ Int. Anganile Munkhondya, Gwebwe Village, 20.11.2011.

Paramount chief Kyungu, Lacky Maluluma Mwanyongo, who passed away in July 2011, is remembered as one of the chiefs who lamented the erosion of Ngonde culture. He championed a campaign of "*tubwesyekesye Ingonde*," reviving the culture. He was concerned that the Kyangonde language is dying slowly, dowry is paid in cash instead of cattle, boys do not get off the bicycle to greet elders, Kyungus are no longer buried at Mbande,²⁶⁸ etc.

In the rituals of chieftaincy and rainmaking/rain-calling, installation and burial a call for dual religious involvement is present. Rain-calling involves pleading with the dead ancestors to forgive and provide the rains. It is also the same ancestors who are implored to act as mediators between the living and the dead. The chiefs are actively involved in all this. Sacrifices, prayers and fire-making are the responsibilities of chiefs. During installation, especially of the Kyungu, the new chief must be taken to Mbande hill for presentation to the ancestors and they must approve or reject the one chosen. Apart from that the rigorous rituals that take place there in secrecy might not be compatible with the Christian faith. The medicines that they take in order to be fearsome and protect themselves from witchcraft or to ward off witchcraft definitely belong to a religion other than Christianity. The taboos which chiefs observe concerning not viewing dead bodies, even of their loved ones, have to do with their medicines. Although Monica Wilson observed that

In the Ngonde, where the proportion of Christians was much greater, there were Christian headmen and chiefs, but the ritual of 'coming out' had disappeared altogether, and the Kyungu had delegated the celebration of all pagan rituals to one of his councilors who still believed in them, he himself being a skeptic.²⁶⁹

I find it difficult to accept that the Kyungu did not believe in the rituals. He probably did this to save his face. It would be unthinkable to have a chief send his councillors to a ritual he did not believe in.

The practice of burying chiefs at night raises a lot of suspicion as to what is involved in the dark. Very few *mafumu* (nobles) go for burial. A case in point is the funeral of the Kyungu who died in July 2011. He was a professing Presbyterian Christian and there had to be two funeral services. One was held during the day, and seven members of the clergy participated in his

²⁶⁸ He was the first to be buried at Mbande after a long break.

²⁶⁹ Monica Wilson, *The Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 175.

Christian funeral service. The coffin was not displayed as per Ngonde custom. Flowers were laid on the table which was displayed in the middle of the gathering. However, the real burial service took place at night without any officiating clergy, because the clergy could not accept to be party to it, and the bereaved family or clan could not be comfortable to have the clergy in attendance. The Kyungu in question, during an interview, commented that Christianity is gaining momentum and that the Ngonde should not cling to the past. He stated that some of the beliefs tend to be archaic. He further observed that participation in ATR was declining.

Faith Healing²⁷⁰

Although many Ngonde Christians do visit *nchimi* to seek healing, it is also true that some resort to faith healing either as the first or last resort depending on one's belief and Christian standing.²⁷¹ Those in the Charismatic and Pentecostal circles rush to faith healing because the devil is believed to be responsible for the illnesses and exorcism is the solution. There are some who have tried all remedies because one did not work and hoped that the other would. It appears that in many cases faith healing is the last resort. Some resort to faith healing before they have a conversion experience, and become born again after healing.

Case 1: Wakisa is a 21 year old young man who has been suffering for two years. His stomach is swollen. I wondered how he manages to ride a bicycle when I saw him. He had been to the hospital but was told that there was nothing they could do. He does not feel pain, but his belly is heavy. It was

²⁷⁰ For a detailed case study about faith healing see Alice Anthony, *Faith and Charisma: The Healing Ministry of Mai Gwayi in the Municipality of Zomba, BA (Theology)*, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Malawi, 2005.

²⁷¹ There are also cases where people resort to faith healing for fear of perceived consequences of bio-medical prescribed treatment. For instance, in 2012, Ezinala Kasisi (not real name) suffered for a short time, complaining of abdominal pains. She went to a clinic in a rural area where she was referred to a district hospital and then to a central hospital in the urban area. After several tests, she was suspected to be having a kidney problem and was booked for further tests and there was a possibility that surgery would follow. She was scheduled to go back to the hospital in January 2013 for final tests before surgery. She really dreaded surgery and she opted for prayers instead. She was afraid she might die in the operating theatre. She hasn't been to the hospital and she continues to suffer. She and her husband visited a traditional healer who explained that she had been bewitched by some relatives in her village and needed to relocate to another village.

said that his aunt bewitched him and that she is hiding some of her witchcraft equipment in his stomach. This story was not shared by the young man himself but by others. The man has been taken to various traditional healers without getting healed. He finally joined Lupaso Born Again Church where he was prayed for. However, his stomach is still swollen. It is now ten years; he is still waiting to receive his healing from the Lord. He even claimed that Jesus never fails, and time is not an issue to him. He still believes that God will heal him, either on this earth or in heaven. He attributes his illness to the works of the devil.²⁷² Asked whether he thinks that he was bewitched, his response was that it is "the work of the devil."

Case 2: Lorraine's story above was incomplete. Lorraine, a member of Assemblies of God Church had a problem of swollen legs. She visited several hospitals and traditional healers but there was very little improvement. In 2002 she planned to attend a Student Christian Organisation of Malawi (SCOM) conference and when an invitation to pray for the sick was made she volunteered to be prayed for. She reported that as the prayers were in progress, she passed out. While in that state, she claims that she saw dirty rags coming out of her legs and she felt a great heat in her legs. Later on, she saw a *ndondosha* or demon come out of her legs. When she came to, she realized that she had been instantly healed. Since that time, she has not experienced any pains in her legs.

Case 3: Olivia had been suffering from high blood pressure for a long time. She had sought help from medical doctors. However, she felt that they could not heal it but would instead make her live on pills. She then decided to go to traditional healers where she was given medicines. These medicines did not heal her either. Later, she joined a fellowship group which believed in prayers for healing. She was prayed for and was healed. She has been healed since ten years.

Case 4: Meriana suffered from *fimbuza* for a long time; she was, in fact, a *fimbuza* dancer. Traditionally, the spirits cannot be exorcised through the dancing. They can only be appeased. This is why those suffering from this disease have to dance again and again whenever they are under attack (*nandi fyanyamuka or fyakwa*). The dancing did not help Meriana much. However, when a visiting evangelist came to her area, she was prayed for to

²⁷² Christians who belong to Charismatic churches generally attribute illnesses to the devil and demons rather than to witchcraft. Witches belong to the group of demons and are considered to be agents of the devil.

get rid of the spirits. After the prayers, she never danced again, for many years.

Exorcism is popularly known as 'deliverance' in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles where prayer sessions are held to release people from demons or evil spirits. Exorcism is done using Jesus' name. Those who cast out the demons or evil spirits take after Jesus Christ who successfully exorcised the evil spirits from those who had them. Exorcism has become widespread as a response to pastoral needs.²⁷³ In Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, it is widely believed that God can heal any illness, whether spiritual or physical, through prayer. Like in the case of Meriana above, *fimbuza* is in the category of demon possession and exorcism is the only remedy.²⁷⁴ The idea of deliverance comes in because those who are possessed are considered to be 'bound' by the spirits. So when the spirits are cast out the victim is freed from the bondage.

Conversion as Healing

Case 1: I, Joyce, was born in a Christian family four decades ago. My journey through life was not an easy one as a young girl. My parents tell me that my life was introduced into suffering a few months after I was born. Being the first born in my family, my parents decided to leave their place of work to go to the village to present me to their parents. While there, something strange happened one night. My mother heard a baby crying but when she woke up to breastfeed her, the baby was nowhere to be found! The crying went on for quite some time and my parents were troubled as they continued the search. After 20 minutes of futile search, they gave up and sat quietly in the bedroom, wondering what might have happened to the baby. Ten minutes later, they heard a banging sound that indicated that something had fallen from elsewhere. To the parents' relief, what had been thrown was the baby (Joyce) who had been crying for over 30 minutes. They found the baby under the bed but she was wet and covered with boils all over her body. From then on, this child would develop boils on her body each time she was taken to the village for a visit. Later, her parents decided not to take her to the village again for fear of the boils. When they visited

²⁷³ G.H. Twelftree, "Exorcism," in Sinclair Ferguson and David Wright,(eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988, pp. 244-246.

²⁷⁴ Rhodian Munyenembe describes such illness as 'strange illness' which makes some Charismatic evangelists to suggest that deliverance is the only way to set the victim free. See his book *Christianity and Socio-Cultural Issues: The Charismatic Movement and Contextualization in Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2011, p. 85.

the *nchimi*, they were told that witches had poured hot water on the baby the night she got lost for a while and had cast a spell on her which she would live with for the rest of her life.

When I was 12 years old, while doing my education at primary school, strange things started happening again in my life. I could collapse regularly, at school and at home. At times convulsions could occur. My parents could take me to the hospital. At other times they could just receive a message from the teachers that their daughter was admitted at the hospital because she had collapsed at school. This was the case for the remaining five years of my primary school education. What was interesting was that the medical personnel could not find anything wrong with my health. They could only diagnose me of hysteria and the usual advice was for me to 'go home and stop worrying.' As a young girl, I did not have many things to worry about as both of my parents were with me. I was not an orphan. My father was a soldier and we had free housing, water, electricity, education and school uniform. Academically, I was doing very well. However, the problem was persistent.

My parents concluded that the hospital was not in a position to assist me and they decided to take me to traditional healers (*nchimi*) regardless of the fact that they were committed Presbyterians. I seemed to get better following every visit to different traditional healers. I was taken to twenty-five different traditional healers in Zomba (where I was born and grew up), Chiradzulu, Mulanje, Lilongwe, Mzuzu, Karonga and other places. Some of them had the ability to tell about my future and they told us different stories altogether. The diagnosis from the traditional doctors was different from the medical one. They claimed that I had been bewitched and I was suffering from *fimbuza* (spirit-possession). In some instances, they beat the drums for some time to induce the spirits in me to dance,²⁷⁵ but this failed on several occasions. I never danced, and some *nchimi* concluded that I had *fimbuza fikali* (very angry spirits). The visits to the *nchimi* continued whenever it became necessary.

In 1985, I was selected to go for secondary school education. My parents were very worried about me. They were not sure how I would stay in a

²⁷⁵ The *fimbuza* dance is one of the therapies for *fimbuza* victims. See Silas S. Ncozana, *The Spirit Dimension in African Christianity: A Pastoral Study among the Tumbuka People of Northern Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2002, p. 99, and Boston Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015.

boarding secondary school with my chronic condition. However, my *fimbuza* story took a different twist in 1986, when I attended a Student Christian Organization of Malawi (SCOM) conference, where secondary school students gathered for four days. One day, after preaching his sermon, the preacher invited those who wanted to make a commitment to follow Christ to go to the front. I made a commitment to follow Christ, and that marked the end of my suffering. No one prayed for my healing, but the illness disappeared.

Case 2: A former member of Karonga New Apostolic Church shared his life story of how he suffered from stomach-ache for five years. He had been treated at different hospitals and by different *ng'anga* but was not healed. He had been prayed for by famous evangelists in Karonga but was not healed. He confessed that he was only looking for healing, not conversion. It did not work. One time when he went to Prophet Kalolo of Destiny Liberty Church in Karonga, he was challenged to accept Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour and the moment he did that, the stomach-ache disappeared. Now he is free from pain and believes that he received his healing because of conversion. At the time of this research ten months had passed since he received his healing.

Levels of Christian Commitment and Levels of Duality

From this study, it can be observed that there is a correlation between levels of Christian commitment and levels of dual religious involvement. The level of Christian commitment determines the probability of one's involvement in duality, and the extent of that involvement. Before this differentiation can be made, it is important to define the term Christian. Although it is not easy to classify Christians because of the difficulty of knowing their inner beliefs and feelings, a certain kind of classification has to be made to act as a measure or a guide to the discussion on the relationship between the levels of Christian commitment and levels of duality. The classification of Christian commitment will be done using observable behaviours of Christians involved, and the sacramental²⁷⁶ requirements of various Christian churches will also be taken into account.

²⁷⁶ A sacrament is "a physical token that expresses a spiritual reality." Michael Green, "Sacraments" in Robert Banks & R. Paul Stevens (eds), *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A to Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997, pp. 869-870.

Definition of the Term Christian

Definitions of the term Christian are many, varied, and mostly applicable to particular contexts. For instance, Mark Mattison says, "A Christian is sometimes said to be someone who has made a decision, sometimes, someone who belongs to a church; far too often someone who confesses the right creeds."²⁷⁷ A simple biblical definition would be that a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ. This definition is derived from Acts 11:26; 26:28. This term is commonly used today to refer to those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ; those who believe in Jesus Christ. The term was first used in Antioch because the followers of Jesus Christ had the behaviour, activity and speech like that of Christ. It is for that reason that Christianity is defined as "a way of moral life that exemplifies how Jesus lived. It is imparted when one believes in Jesus Christ Himself."²⁷⁸

As mentioned earlier, almost everyone I interviewed claimed to be a Christian, therefore there is need to examine the different definitions.

Census Christians

This includes those who claim to belong to a Christian church without having fulfilled the requirements of the church. A census Christian is one who says that he or she is a Christian but hardly ever goes to church. It is someone who selects Christianity as their religion for any purposes such as the national census, but they are not practicing Christians. Christians in this category are those who think they belong to a religion/church and yet no one in that church knows that they belong to it. Such members have nothing to show that they are Christians apart from claiming that they are. This may result from the fact that they were born and raised in a Christian family, or their grandfather was a Christian, or a mission station was established in their area or that the nation is Christian and that makes them Christian as well.

Different Christian churches have different requirements that those who want to join must fulfill. For instance, some churches require that its members attend prescribed Sunday school, catechetical or discipleship classes and after completion, be baptized and attain full membership. In most churches, the common way to join is through baptism. The classes are

²⁷⁷ Mark Mattison, "What is a Christian?" True Grace Ministries, <http://www.auburn.edu> (15.10.2011).

²⁷⁸ Frank Chirwa, *Selected Eschatologies in the Johannine Gospel: Comparisons and Contrasts with African Traditional Religion*, PhD Module, Mzuzu University, 2010.

meant to ensure that one understands the faith and the doctrines of the church which are said to be derived from the Bible. So census Christians are those who have not taken any or sufficient steps to become members but they tell themselves that they are.²⁷⁹ There are some who show up at the church may be twice a year; during Christmas and Easter.

Among the Ngonde, based on my research, some traditional healers and *nchimi* claim to be Christians although they have not gone to church for many years. It is possible that they were Christians before they became *nchimi* but they may no longer qualify to be Christians, even though they may claim that they were once baptized and were faithful members. In addition, there are some who were disciplined by their churches for violating Christian principles and have never made any effort to repent for many years. However, there are some among those who do not go to church who pay monthly contributions to the church.

Nominal Christians

The term "nominal" comes from a Greek word *nomos* which is translated "name" in English. When this term is used with the word Christian, it means those who are Christian in name but not in deed. They are those who proclaim the name Christian yet remain uncommitted to Christianity. This is a generic group to which many who claim to be Christians belong. This can as well be the sociological definition of a Christian... They are 'fake' Christians.

It must be noted though that nominal Christians comprise those who have fulfilled the requirements of the church, but do not practise their Christianity. They may have attended discipleship classes and have been baptized to be admitted into its membership. This includes those who go to church without participating or being engaged in the body of Christ. They go to church as a habit; they come to church without any commitment. They get themselves baptized, and participate in sacraments like Holy Communion, but may not go beyond that. Some even think that baptism makes them Christians. Such Christians may not give any contributions, and the church might not really involve them in its activities, because they appear not to be available for activities other than attending worship services on Saturday or Sunday. These Christians may also live their lives contrary to what Christianity expects of them. Thus, they do exactly what

²⁷⁹ This is the definition usually applied in a population census, including in Malawi.

the church forbids its members.²⁸⁰ They say they are Christians but they do not trust or depend upon the Lord. They are not faithful to the Lord in their ways. They are those who will use the name of the Lord to appear Christian while they are not his inwardly, and may not have anything to show that they are Christians. One author expressed his observation thus

Today there are many that say they are Christians. One problem however is that if it became (or should I say when) illegal to be Christian, there would not be enough evidence to convict them.²⁸¹

Kondwani Dzekedzeke observed a similar thing concerning the membership of the church:

Two groups of members exist in a church—those with a strong commitment and dedication to their particular way of practice of Christianity, and those who care so little what they believe and practice as a denomination.²⁸²

A nominal Christian is religious, but not godly. And there are some who display the form of godliness but deny the power of God (2 Tim 3:5). They are not yet converted but they are found in the church. They claim to be Christian when it is convenient for them, instead of living the Christian life all the time. They act like Christians when they are with Christians but when they are not they suspend their being Christian and live a different life.

Some of the nominal Christians become members of the church for reasons that the church is not intended for. Some of the Ngonde Christians gave their own reasons for joining a church. For instance, some are members of the church not because they have a personal faith in Jesus Christ, but because it is the church they have belonged to since they were born, especially those who were brought up in Christian homes. Others are more concerned about what will happen after they die, and being members of

²⁸⁰ Actually, they are not different from outsiders. They are the type of Christians that outsiders would refer to when they say 'If so and so will enter heaven, I will also.' They have not been made new creatures as 2 Cor 5:17 states.

²⁸¹ "Nominal Christianity," www.shatteredmen.com/nominal/htm. The fact that many are Christians but very few are committed is also reflected in Matthew 7:21-23 – "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers!'"

²⁸² Kondwani Dzekedzeke, *Conversion in a Malawian Context: People's Choice of Church Affiliation*, BA, University of Malawi, nd.

the church guarantees them a decent burial. People who do not belong to any church are buried like *nimbwa* (dogs), so people do everything they can to belong to a church so that some prayers will be offered for them at death. The focus is not on the condition of their hearts but on the state of their funeral. Others, especially the youth, indicated that they wanted to sing in the choir. These are some of the reasons why nominal Christianity is commonplace. In writing about nominal Christianity, H.L. Pretorius has this to say:

It has been seen in the history of the church that second and third generation Christians lose personal interest in Christianity. They become Christians in name only, that is, nominal Christians. They are similar to the people of Laodicea of whom the Lord said: "You are neither cold nor warm" (Rev. 3:15). Such people are neither Christian nor non-Christian. Typical of nominal Christians is that they approach God only in times of crisis such as serious financial trouble, illness, death, unemployment or personal calamities. Or, they would like to be counted among the 'decent people' of society and for this reason will attend an occasional service, have their children baptized, marry in church and take part in other superficial religious ceremonies. They will never seriously consider leaving the church. For them God becomes increasingly impersonal. It is difficult to speak to such people for they easily agree with what is being said without taking it to heart. They need Christ.²⁸³

Participating Christians

Many Ngonde are participating Christians but their quality of Christianity is still at a nominal level. This category comprises those who have fulfilled the sacramental requirements and are said to be members who are in 'good standing' with the church. They participate in the life of the congregation by regular attendance at worship services, sending their children to discipleship classes, paying tithes and offerings, attending Bible studies, and availing themselves for other church activities. They also participate in sacraments like Holy Communion and baptism as a tradition. This is a group that may as well be called 'religious', those who want to be Christians but deny the power of Christianity. Their participation may arise from the fact that they started worshiping while young because the parents took them to church. The reason they are Christians is that their parents were Christians and that is what they were taught as they were growing up. They join

²⁸³ H.L. Pretorius, "Nominal Christianity" in *Reflecting on Mission in the African Context: A Handbook for Missiology*, by A.A. Odendaal, P.J. Robinson, G. van der Merwe (eds), Bloemfontein: Pro Christo Publications, 1987.

Christianity as a culture without understanding its real meaning. They are Christians in name and may appear to be in deed, but they are not Christian in the "heart."²⁸⁴ Conversion refers to change in the religious life and behaviour of people. "It generally involves a positive interior change in one's religious conviction, moral and spiritual fervour from a state of unbelief, weak or lukewarm faith, to a holy and devoted religious life."²⁸⁵ Participating Christians are those who have been baptized and feel that they became Christians through baptism.²⁸⁶ They are good at keeping the rules and doctrines of the church, and aim at impressing the pastor or people with their good works, but they do not qualify to be called by that name. Under this group could also be Christians who fit Stephen Kauta's description which he found among the Tumbuka of Malawi:

I now live in a society, which is a mixed one—Christians and non-Christians. I have been interested to find out real distinctions between them, which as yet I cannot. I am not saying that they are both bad or good, no, but that one cannot find any distinction of any kind except on Sundays when those who are baptized go to church for worship.²⁸⁷

Participating Christians also include those who are under discipline. These may not participate fully because there are some things which they have violated or not fulfilled, for example, non-sacramental marriage in the Roman Catholic Church or polygamy in Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. Such people may still be participating in church activities but their participation could be limited. For example, in a Presbyterian Church of Livingstonia Synod, a polygamous person is not allowed to partake in Holy Communion, sing in the choir, offer a prayer publicly or take any leadership

²⁸⁴ While it is difficult to know people's inner feelings and beliefs, it is common knowledge that such Christians do exist. In addition, the Bible even though tells Christians not to judge, says that those who believe in God shall be known by their fruits (Mathew 7:1-5; Mathew 7:16).

²⁸⁵ *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 1972 (ed), p. 284.

²⁸⁶ I am aware that in some churches like the Roman Catholic Church, baptism is considered as a rite through which a person enters the church and becomes Christian. In some churches like Presbyterian, many Christians do think that baptism makes them Christian even though the church does not teach that.

²⁸⁷ Steven Kauta Msiska, *Golden Buttons: Christianity and Traditional Religion among the Tumbuka*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006, p. 27.

positions. However, he can attend worship services, give his offerings, organize work, clean the church, etc.²⁸⁸

Active Christians

These Christians are enthusiastic in the life of a church. If one were looking for a Christian who is reliable, one would point at them. They comprise those who go beyond participation. They become members of some of the groups the church may have. Some are elected deacons, elders, preachers, youth leaders, choir members, ushers, counsellors, etc. They could also be called "committed Christians" or practicing Christians. The commitment may emanate from the relationship they have with God. It can as well be said that these have experienced conversion which involves repentance of sin and have received the forgiveness of sin.²⁸⁹ This group does not simply participate, but portrays what is commonly known as the fruit of the Spirit. They are serious with their Christian life, being careful to obey God's commands as read from His word. They practise what they learn on how they should live their lives. Becoming a Christian for them is not only a change of heart, but also a change of ethos. They become transformed and separate themselves from evil. Christianity has its own code of conduct as found in God's own manual, the Bible.

Born again Christian

Sometimes the term 'born again' is used as a code to distinguish those who are 'true Christians' from 'mere Christians'.²⁹⁰ The term may sometimes be considered impolite, but the level comprises those who claim to have experienced a conversion,²⁹¹ the new birth, received the Spirit. Born again

²⁸⁸ For a deeper discussion of polygamy and the (Presbyterian) church see: Moses Mlenga, *Polygamy in Northern Malawi. A Christian Reassessment*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2016.

²⁸⁹ "Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 713.

²⁹⁰ True Christians are those who have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, while mere Christians are nominal Christians. True Christians are said to be those who are serious with their relationship with Jesus Christ and the mere ones are those who take a casual approach to their relationship with Jesus Christ. Of course there is always a debate as to whether such terms as 'true Christian' or 'mere Christian' exist. Some argue that one is either a Christian or not.

²⁹¹ Conversion is different from regeneration in the sense that conversion is the act of turning from sin and self towards God through Jesus Christ, often as a result of

refers to a spiritual rebirth (regeneration)²⁹² of the human spirit, contrasted with the physical birth everyone experiences. The origin of this terminology is found in the New Testament where Jesus had a conversation with Nicodemus and Jesus gave being born again as one of the conditions for one to see the kingdom of God.²⁹³ Those who profess to be born again often state that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and have a day when they had a conversion experience and have a testimony of how it happened. The emphasis is on accepting Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour, and that is why being 'born again' is used interchangeably with being 'saved.' It is a matter of being saved from hell which is waiting for those who are not saved. Being born again is also associated with being filled by the Holy Spirit and manifesting his gifts in different ways. Spiritual renewal takes place in those who experience conversion. Seventh-day Adventists include repentance in their definition of conversion. Repentance means to change one's mind, to feel remorse, to repent. Genuine repentance results in a radical change in attitude toward God and sin. Through the decided exercise of their wills, they surrender totally to the Saviour and renounce their sinful behavior. Thus repentance reaches its climax in conversion—the turning of the sinner toward God (Acts 15:3).²⁹⁴

Regardless of the terminology that is used, what is remarkable in the Christians of this level is the high level of commitment, and piety shows in their lives far beyond the minimum requirements of church membership.²⁹⁵ Their devotion also shows in their personal lives. It is vital to note that this category also includes those who do not use the term 'born again' but fulfill the requirements and demonstrate devotion in their Christian life. This level

some form of Christian proclamation. Conversion is *completed* by regeneration. A converted person is the reborn person. S.S. Smalley, "Conversion" in Sinclair Ferguson and David Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978, pp. 167-168.

²⁹² Regeneration "describes the inner renewal by the Spirit of God, which takes place when a person becomes a Christian ... A person receives forgiveness of sins through belief in Christ, and is born again to a life characterized by faith, love and hope." H. Burkhardt, "Regeneration," in Sinclair Ferguson and David Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1978, p. 574.

²⁹³ John 3:3-8.

²⁹⁴ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, "2nd edition, Silver Spring: Pacific Press, 2005, p. 135.

²⁹⁵ Being born again actually requires "a radical change, a new beginning." D.A. Carson et al (eds), *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, Leicester: Intervarsity, 1994, p. 1031.

includes those who go beyond "attending the *makalasi*, fulfilling the rules, going to church, behaving one-self and be properly married and buried."²⁹⁶ In the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, it is expected that a candidate for membership should experience a new birth.²⁹⁷ It must be noted that 'born again' is just a code that is used. There is nothing like nominal Christianity. Theologically there is only one definition of a Christian. Either one is a Christian or not, there is nothing like nominal. Thus, a Christian who is nominal is not a Christian, because he is neither hot nor cold and as such will be 'spit[ted] out'.²⁹⁸

Authentic Level of Christianity?

Authentic level of Christianity is the one in which conversion takes place. Conversion is a change in which one adopts a new religion, faith or belief. It involves belief or faith in God, repentance of sin and confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. Grudem expresses it thus:

Conversion itself means "turning"—here it represents a spiritual turn, a turning *from* sin *to* Christ. The turning from sin is called repentance, and the turning to Christ is called *faith*.²⁹⁹

While conversion is immediate, the process of adapting to the new religious ethos may take some time because there are adjustments that one has to make in the process of growth in the Christian life. However, staying in the condition of making adjustments forever shows that one is not willing to give up the old for the new. So the important element of conversion is change. Conversion is the "reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is

²⁹⁶ Klaus Fiedler, "The Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements in Malawi in Cultural Perspective," *Religion in Malawi* no. 9. November 1999, pp. 27-38.

²⁹⁷ The International Christian Assembly (ICA), a local church under the Assemblies of God in Malawi expects its members to: have the experience of New Birth, be baptized in water, demonstrate holiness of conduct, faithfulness in attendance at all services, faithfulness in paying tithes of all income to the church, faithfulness to the doctrine and policies of the Assemblies of God in Malawi, and completion of the church membership. (International Christian Assembly: Membership Manual, n.d.)

²⁹⁸ Rev. 3:15. This is what Jesus said to the church in Laodicea.

²⁹⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 709.

involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right."³⁰⁰ Some New Testament texts use the imagery of new birth and new life to refer to conversion.

Conversion is more than a change of mind, more than undergoing some experience; it is a concrete change to a new way of life, as the word 'turn' suggests—turning in one's tracks and going in a new direction. True turning to God follows upon repentance and belief, and it leads not only to an observable new way of life, but to a spiritual transformation as well.³⁰¹

Conversion involves adoption of a new ethos so that those seeing you will be able to tell that there is a change in your life. Conversion has implications. This is in line with Billy Mayaya's and Kondwani Dzekedzeke's assertions about conversion.³⁰²

For many of the Ngonde conversion to Christianity means something else. It does not mean a concrete change to a new way of life; it is adopting a new way of life while maintaining the former way of life in such a way that both life styles are utilized concurrently, depending on the demands upon their lives. This therefore rules out a total u-turn notion. They appear to permanently stay in the state of "adhesion" during which they stand with one foot on either side of the fence. I agree with Ejizu that in Africa,

Religious conversion is such a complex and fluid matter. Particularly in Africa, with the tremendous resilience and adaptability of the indigenous religions, the persistence of vital beliefs among many converts to Christianity and Islam, it is extremely difficult to be categorical about the state of religious conversion of the majority of people. The astonishing stories of phenomenal achievements of the missionary religions and of heroic lives of faith by numerous converts to Christianity or Islam ought to be taken together with the constant complaints against shallowness of faith, nominal membership, syncretic practices among a large segment of the dynamic presence

³⁰⁰ Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: the Old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, London, 1933, p. 7.

³⁰¹ J. Marsh, "Conversion" in *The Interpreter's of Dictionary of the Bible*, New York: Abingdon, 1962, p. 678.

³⁰² Billy Mayaya states that conversion "implies a break from one's former mode of life." Billy Mayaya, *Conversion: A Hermeneutical Analysis of the Old Testament*, Mzuzu: PhD Module, Mzuzu University, 2008.

and activities of spirit beings and cosmic forces in people's lives, belief in re-incarnation persist among most Africans.³⁰³

While it is true that some of the conversions are weak, and these are many, strong conversions are also taking place and the church is thriving because of such conversions.

Levels of Christian Commitment and Dual Involvement

It has been established in this study that many Christians participate in some elements of African Traditional Religions. Although there are several ATR elements that Christians participate in, the most common is consulting *nchimi*/traditional healers for various purposes, mainly healing. However, there is a difference in the participation in ATR elements based on the levels of Christian commitment.

Census Christians

Since census Christians are not committed to Christianity, they consider themselves to be on free range—free to do whatever they like. For census Christians, there cannot be any mention of dual religiosity because they are not Christians by biblical standards. Dual religiosity can only be applied where there is commitment to both Christian values and ATR elements. Suffice it to say that although they use Christianity as their religion for purposes of registration and other things, census Christians are more prone to involvement in ATR elements compared to the other levels of Christian commitment, because they are neither bound by the fear of God in their hearts nor the rules of the church.

A tricky situation, however, is created as to where the traditional healers and *nchimi*, who pay monthly financial contributions, even when they have not been to church in many years, may be placed. It is very likely that some of the *nchimi* count themselves as members because they give their monthly contributions to the church.³⁰⁴ The interesting thing is that

³⁰³ Christopher I. Ejizu, Conversion in African Traditional Religions, <http://afrikaworld.net/afrel/conversion.htm> (3.9.2011).

³⁰⁴ One of the CCAP leaders indicated that the church receives contributions from suspended church members, but of course it is a requirement that the suspended members attend worship services. The church separates contributions from the status of the giver. In fact, one of the things that will be considered when readmitting the suspended member into fellowship is the payment of monthly contributions.

churches do receive the contributions regardless of who is giving them. For instance, many churches do not approve of *nchimi* consultation and yet some do receive contributions from *nchimi*. Two *nchimi* claimed that they give their monthly contributions to the church.³⁰⁵ This may partly show that churches disapprove involvement with diviners on paper, but in practice they appear to be interacting with them through their contributions. Surely there is someone who keeps a record of the diviner's contributions and the church uses them.

Nominal Christians

This category is of those whose Christian commitment is superficial. They have fulfilled some of the requirements of the church and are not active in their involvement in the full life of the church. This category appears to be more dual than the rest of the categories of Christianity as discussed above. Most of cases of dual involvement discussed above have to do with nominal Christianity. This is evidenced by the testimonies and stories that many respondents shared. Some attributed their dual involvement to lack of knowledge of the truth, and by truth they were referring to personal commitment to Christ and Christian values. Some pointed out that they were not rooted in the word, which implies that they were ignorant of what the Bible teaches about the various aspects of their lives and how they could relate with the environment around them. Some Christians note that they were not fully converted and as such had little faith.³⁰⁶ Some explained that they had been "Christians" but had no relationship with Christ. The problem is that people may "convert" to Christianity without a real commitment to Christ.³⁰⁷ This shows that nominal Christians are more prone to dual religiosity than those who are committed to Christian values.

Participating Christians

This category comprises those who fulfill the requirements of the church and participate in the life of the church and are considered 'religious' in that

³⁰⁵ Both of them showed me their recent receipts of the contributions they had made. When I asked the leadership of their churches, they stated that that was an oversight and they would look into it so that the situation is normalized. They did not want to be seen to be participating in evil things.

³⁰⁶ This then shows that conversion takes place at different levels; conversion to Christianity or church, and then renewal of the heart. The conversion that is being referred to here is the rebirth. It is interesting that people can talk of having little faith while they were not converted.

³⁰⁷ M.F.C. Bourdillon, *Religion and Society*, Gweru: Mambo, 1980, p. 283.

they participate in most of the activities of the church, without experiencing renewal in their hearts. The situation for participating Christians is quite similar to that of nominal Christians, except that participating Christians are active in the church. Participating in the activities of the church gives such people satisfaction and they may think that they are Christians by virtue of their participation in giving, Bible studies, choir singing, being a member of a certain church group, etc. In some cases, Christians participate to please the church leaders and fellow Christians, although some may ignorantly feel that they are pleasing God. Participating Christians are more prone to dual religiosity especially in the areas of consultation of *nchimi* for various reasons and participation in *chikungu*, because they do not have the tools that may assist them resist the temptation to be dual.

Active Christians

Committed Christians are those who have fulfilled all the requirements of the church and are committed to Christian values. They make an effort to obey what God says in his word and are careful not to violate his teaching. These Christians will of course occasionally get tempted to indulge in dual religiosity due to circumstances in their life. There could be some lapses, but when such things happen they regret their dual involvement. Some of the aspects of dualism are most likely to be tempted include consultation of *nchimi* for illnesses that are believed to be caused by witchcraft, or in search of the fruit of the womb. Barrenness can be a reason for a woman to be divorced by her husband and it brings a lot of stress on her. In this study, many active Christians, including church leaders, were dual because they wanted to have children.

Born Again Christians

Christians who profess a personal faith in Jesus Christ or those who claim to be 'born again' tend to be involved considerably less in dual religiosity as compared to those who do not. This is the case regardless of whether the churches, to which they belong, are mainline or Pentecostal.³⁰⁸ Since some

³⁰⁸ Those who profess a personal faith in Jesus Christ (those who have experienced conversion) are not restricted to Pentecostal or Charismatic churches alone. Many are found in mainline churches as well, even though their conversion is sometimes attributed to factors outside their church. For example, some are converted during evangelism rallies organized by either their own churches or others, para-church organizations, or some revival groups. Circumstances in which each of the individuals interviewed from the mainline churches became 'born again' vary from person to person, as does the terminology used.

mainline churches do not emphasize the need to publicly profess as one's own decision personal faith in Jesus Christ, many Christians do not publicly proclaim their decision for a personal faith and as such there are not many who are considered to be "born again" Many members from Pentecostal or Charismatic churches indicated that they no longer participate in things that are related to African Traditional Religion because they are considered demonic and at the same time they are connected to worship of idols. A reasonable number of Christians who were interviewed stated that they were involved in dual practices *before* they became born again but after knowing the truth, they stopped. This emanates from the fact that the Pentecostal/Charismatics who experience conversion "see themselves as those who have been freed from the 'tyranny' of evil and subsequently are accountable for their own actions as well as those of their loved ones."³⁰⁹ This includes church leaders and pastors. A good example is the story that Stella shared which has been presented in this study. She was troubled by witches and went from one *ng'anga* to another to seek help. When she experienced conversion, she threw away all the charms that she was given, and she slept peacefully. She narrated that "she had been a Christian but she had no relationship with Christ; she was not rooted in the word and had little faith."³¹⁰

Needless to say that Christians from Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are also at different levels; some are more spiritually mature than others, and those who are not mature in the faith sometimes yield to the temptation of visiting *nchimi*. For example, Anosisye, a member of Living Waters Church was born again in 2009. Before he came to Christ, his business prospered because he used to get help from *nchimi*. He could also 'fortify' his body through incisions made my *ng'anga* where medicine was applied. He used to take his sick wife to *nchimi* for healing. Since he became born again, his business is not doing very well because he has been taught to believe in Christ alone. He mentioned that he is tempted to go back to the *ng'anga* because they still come to coax him to visit them because his business is declining. He shared that people put charms on the way to his shop so that customers should not come. He feels that his business is going down because it is vulnerable as there is no security that was previously offered by the charms. Because of this he sometimes sees himself taking

³⁰⁹ Billy Mayaya, 'Gendered' Experience of Conversion in Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches, a paper presented at the Postgraduate Colloquium, Mzuzu University, 2009.

³¹⁰ Int. Stella, Karonga CCAP, 21.3.2010.

steps towards the old practices because it appears that his new faith is not working to his advantage.

Another case concerns a member of Christian Love Church who was born again three years before this research was conducted. He has children who were being disturbed in their sleep. One of them was running in his sleep and could even go outside the house shouting while mentioning the name of the late grandfather. This happened for close to a month. Prayers were offered for the children but without any success. He was advised by elders in the village to perform a ritual at the tomb of the grandfather whose name was being mentioned by one of the children. He took his children to the grandfather's tomb and performed the ritual. Since that time, his children sleep peacefully. He noted as he was sharing his story that this happened because he is still growing in the faith and hopes that one day it will come to an end—that he will not do it again. He also noted that no one from his church knows about the ritual that he performed and he feels safe.

However, there are isolated cases of Christians in these Pentecostal churches who can be considered as mature Christians but who still participate in elements of ATR. One case concerns a woman who had become born again in early 1993 and is a member of Pentecostal Holiness Association. She is married and is a mother of six girls. Her husband became born again in 1995. When she was a mother of three girls, she was under pressure from her husband and his family to have male children. Her marriage was on the verge of breaking because of not giving birth to boys. When they shared their problem with the church leaders, they counselled them and they prayed with them. They were urged to trust God who is able to provide the male children they desired to have. The couple was not satisfied, and, to solve their problem, they visited a *nchimi* who advised them to bring a huge cock³¹¹ of any colour. When they brought the cock, the *nchimi* took it and cut one of its toes, and allowed the blood to drop in a clay pot which contained some herbs. Then, the *nchimi* took a red ball found at the end of the banana plant on which fruits appear. He took two layers and used each for the two to administer the medicine and the covers were dropped on the floor. They were assured that they would have boys from that day onwards. However, this did not work. She ended up with three more girls. She is still living with her husband but he has a second wife. Of course the issue here is not whether it worked or not, but the fact

³¹¹ It was necessary for them to bring a cock because they wanted male children. If they wanted female children, the *nchimi* would have asked them to bring a hen.

that she went to consult a *nchimi* even when she professed to have a personal faith in Christ. She has been a born again Christian for a long time but since she faced a crisis in her life, she still felt that the *nchimi* would solve her problem.

Being born again also assists Christians to resist temptations to dual religiosity. This is evidenced by the rejection of Pentecostal Christians to be involved in what is considered a demonic religion. For instance, Florence Sikwamba refused to wash her baby in medicated water even when she was threatened that her baby might die. She trusted in her God and indeed her two children survived. Some refused to participate in the *chikungu* ritual because of their faith.

The Pentecostal or Charismatic church's stand also contributes towards restraining its members from participating in ATR elements. The issue is that the church condemns any involvement in ATR and it is labelled "demonic". Ward expresses it thus:

The Pentecostal Movement tends to be even more condemnatory of compromise with paganism than the old established Churches, and consequently more hostile to those African Instituted Churches which are arrogantly dismissed as pagan. On the other hand the Pentecostal movement does focus on, rather than shy away from, the realm of spiritual powers, and so (like the older Independent Churches) can be seen as dealing with this important area of life in more honest and direct ways, helping people to cope with the struggle which defines and circumscribes day-to-day-life for so many.³¹²

The Charismatic Movement emphasizes personal commitment—'being born again'—and the power of Jesus Christ to forgive, heal, and protect from evil. They also advocate a life of pure morals and fair dealing in work and business.³¹³ Born again Christians are therefore less prone to dual involvement because their needs, including those that are considered to be met by traditional means,³¹⁴ are genuinely met in their churches or

³¹² K. Ward, "Tukutendereza Yesu – the Balokole Revival Movement in Uganda," in Zablon Nthamburi (ed), *A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa*, Nairobi: Uzima, 1991.

³¹³ Irene John, "Charismatics and Community," in John Parratt (ed), *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, London: SPCK, 1987, pp. 129-137.

³¹⁴ These include illnesses believed to be caused by witchcraft, being troubled by witches, disturbance from ancestral spirits, etc. Most of these problems are ascribed to demons whose remedy is exorcism. For details on exorcism see Ulf Strohschneider, *Physical Healing and Exorcism in Malawian Pentecostal Churches*, Zomba: University of Malawi, 2001.

fellowships. Born again Christians possess tools which help them resist the temptation to be dual, because they are encouraged to put their faith in Christ, who is the answer to every situation. Christ is believed to be providing strength to Christians in their constant struggle with Satan. 'Born agains' are urged by their leaders to be confident because they are "anointed", "Winners", "Overcomers", "Champions."³¹⁵

The level of one's commitment to Christianity plays a role on whether one will be involved in duality or not. Those who are more committed to Christian values tend to be less committed to dual religious involvement. It must be noted, however, that being born again is not a guarantee that one will not participate in ATR elements—the label does not provide any immunity. There are some who claim to be born again but their life style does not tally with their claim. Suffice to say that there is a relationship between the level of Christian commitment and the level at which one will be involved in dual religiosity.

Differences in Dual Involvement

Of essence also is the differentiation of dual involvement. It must be noted that dual involvement takes place at different levels as can be gathered from the stories above. For some, involvement was regular, while for others it was occasional, and at times accidental. Further, some were involved due to pressure from relatives while others participated in dual religiosity because of the nature of their work in the community. For some, involvement was on the cultural level, since there is a very thin line between culture and African Traditional Religions.

Regular Level

The various occasions in which some Ngonde Christians participate in dual religiosity do occur regularly. This regular participation arose from various factors. It was believed that some diseases could not to be healed biomedically, so each time one suffered from those particular diseases,³¹⁶ they rushed to the traditional healers. Some participated in dual religiosity out of convenience, like in the case of those who consulted *nchimi* for healing and other services, because they were close to them. This applies to those who claimed that they lived very far from hospitals and found visiting a *nchimi*

³¹⁵ Aylward Shorter and Joseph Njiru, *New Religious Movements in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines, 2001, p. 62.

³¹⁶ Examples include *fimbuza*, mental illness, illness resulting from curses and from witchcraft, etc.

more convenient for them. In addition, some issues could hardly be taken to medical practitioners because it was obvious that they would not get help from them. This includes cases like, body, house, property and marriage fortification; being troubled by witches,³¹⁷ searching for lost people, animals and items; searching for employment and promotion. Regular participation in dual religiosity can also be attributed to perceptions about causation. If a Ngonde Christian is convinced that a situation is the result of witchcraft, they will in most cases resort to traditional means of dealing with such situations.

Occasional Level

This level is where Christians are involved in dual involvement during special occasions; it is not something that they do regularly. Such occasions include protracted illness, funerals, and a threat of harm towards their lives through witchcraft. From the various stories shared by my respondents, it can be gathered that some dual involvement was an act of necessity based on the circumstances they faced. When a sudden death occurred, one could go to a *nchimi* to find out the one who was responsible for the death. Death occurs once in a while, and sudden death is even rarer, so if one visits a *nchimi* in such a situation it may be interpreted as occasional dual religiosity. Of course, one's visit to a *ng'anga* should not be considered in isolation from other instances that may have led him or her to consult traditional healer at the time of such a particular death. One's life story plays a big role in establishing whether an individual is dual religious. In some cases some Christians used traditional elements to have children or to have children of a particular sex, in order to save their marriages from breaking. Some would be involved because they are looking for a job and once they find it, they quit. The fact is, they are involved in dual religiosity but on special occasions. During funerals some interesting rituals related to traditional religious elements are performed. Some will get involved at that level. There is a discussion in this study about the *chikungu* ritual where it is argued that some Christians from various churches participate. This is also occasional participation because droughts do not occur every year.

³¹⁷ I am aware that medical persons may provide a psychological help through counselling and other means, but that may not make sense to a traditional Ngonde who does not believe in such things. Suffice to say that the *ng'anga/nchimi* use traditional 'psychology' which they are used to. Some of the cases listed here could also be taken to professional counsellors or the police, however, perception about causation also comes into play.

There were also some Christians who participated in dual religiosity out of pressure from relatives and others. Based on examples given in this study, some reluctantly accepted to consult a diviner due to protracted illness and due to pressure from parents. A good example is the issue of Michael, discussed in one of the sections above, who was on the verge of being disowned by his parents, for refusing to visit a diviner because of his faith. Michael had a persistent problem of blood shortage and needed blood transfusions often. Michael gave in to the parents' demands, although he hated doing it.

While some Christians participate in the witch-cleansing ritual out of their own volition, some do so under pressure from the community leaders. The witch-cleansing ritual is occasionally done, based on perceived need. Some Christians participate for fear of being banished from the village and because they do not want to be suspected of being witches. These, together with the other stories shared in this study, represent occasional dual religiosity resulting from pressure.

Obviously, involvement becomes necessary when there is a crisis in the lives of Christians. This is the time when they sometimes wish or are advised or are pressurized to seek help through traditional means. In most cases these Christians act out of desperation. When the crisis or problem is solved, they will have nothing to do with elements of traditional religion until another crisis crops up. It is noteworthy that whatever is done seems to be done with good intentions.

Official Level

Sometimes Christians get involved in dualism at the official level because of their office or as directed by the authorities. As we have seen in the discussion above, there is no separation between chieftaincy and medicines, because chiefs are defenders of their people and must have bodyguards in their bodies in order to fulfill their duty. Thus, traditional medicines are a requirement, and part and parcel of chieftaincy, regardless of whether one likes it. One respondent shared that her brother declined when he was selected as village headman because he is a born again Christian and felt that his spiritual life would be compromised if he went through the process of becoming a village headman.³¹⁸ The procedures of Kyunguship are more complicated than those of village headmanship, and one has to observe several taboos like not viewing dead bodies. In addition,

³¹⁸ Int. Gladys Mwalukomo, Mwambuli Village, 7.3.2011.

if the Kyungu is a Christian, the church leaders shun his burial, which takes place at night. Conversely, the leaders are in a way excluded because they are not allowed to witness the burial. Some Kyungus do not want to be involved in all this, but they have to do it because that is what the society expects of them.³¹⁹ In fact, their lives are led and guided by the nobles. Chiefs and *makambala* make vows to obey the stipulated rules of chieftaincy and their office as noblemen so that they do not break them. Chiefs cannot argue against *makambala*; they fear them. They are the chief's advisors but at the same time, they assist in governing his kingdom.³²⁰ One village headman lamented that "for chiefs, the challenge is that sometimes one inherits chieftaincy while he is already a Christian/church elder/pastor, so one is forced by the situation to be involved in 'unchristian things', especially if he belongs to the royal family."³²¹ It must further be noted, however, that some Christian village headmen do succeed in refusing to be involved in some practices which may appear to contradict the biblical teachings. For instance, there is one Baptist Church pastor who is *lifumu*, an advisor to a group village headman. Although he accepted the position, he does not participate in activities which contradict his faith and the biblical teachings. He rejects such practices and people respect him for his stand. "I do not allow the position to manage me, but I manage the position."³²²

Apart from the chieftaincy, some are ritual leaders during rain-calling or rain making rituals and as such, they must be seen to be doing their work as expected by the community. While this is true, dualism still comes into play because rainmaking involves interaction with ancestral spirits, which compromises one's faith. The sacrifices and the prayers that are made are seen by many Christians to be in conflict with the Christian faith. Culturally, the ritual leaders appear not to have an option. One of the ritual leaders indicated that the position is hereditary and as such there was no way he could avoid it. For him, what he is doing is service to the community. He believes that the service does not compromise his faith, because God is the provider of all things. He emphasized that rain provides water and water is life. He considers his duty to be of noble character.

³¹⁹ Int. Lucky Mwanyongo (T/A Kyungu), Mwambuli Village, 5.3.2011.

³²⁰ Int. A.D. K, Mwembe Village, 20.11.2010. He is a Village Headman.

³²¹ Int. Beyard Kwiwula Mwanyongo, Kwiwula Village, 16.7.2011. He is a village headman. He could not be drawn into disclosing what these 'unchristian things' are. My view is that these are things related to traditional medicines.

³²² Int. Hosman Simutowe, Karonga Baptist Pastor, 20.3.2012.

At the official level, there are also some Christians who fortify their positions in various situations. There are some who are employed and do not want their positions to be taken away from them. They use charms and traditional medicines to keep themselves in their positions. This also applies to promotion. Some seek traditional medicine to be promoted. For example, one pastor shared that before he became a pastor, while he was already a Christian, he consulted a diviner because he wanted to be promoted. He had not been promoted in fifteen years, and yet those who were employed after him had been promoted to two or three ranks above him. He therefore sought traditional healers and he was eventually promoted.³²³

It is believed that some pastors use charms in their ministry to fortify themselves because they are targeted in most cases. One pastor of the Presbyterian Church claimed that pastors in the north fortify themselves with traditional medicine if they want to be successful in their Christian ministry. However, this claim was made without any evidence given. During the interviews that I conducted among some pastors on the use of traditional medicine for ministry's sake, one pastor narrated that he knew of a pastor who fortified himself following the experiences he had in one of the duty stations where most members of the church he was pastoring were drunkards. When he arrived at the duty station, after learning that most members were drunkards, he decided to preach against beer-drinking. After preaching for two Sundays, some of the members were not happy. One morning as he woke up, he found himself sleeping on his bed, but outside his house. He was very surprised and afraid at the same time. In addition, part of his hair was shaved and he did not know who did it. He concluded that this was a result of witchcraft. This made him seek help from traditional healers.

It is also alleged that some pastors, especially from Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, use traditional medicine to preach with vigour to attract many people to their churches. This arises from the fact that there is competition for members (sheep) and church leaders are doing everything possible to attract many to their church. The higher the number of members, the higher the total amount of money that the church collects in

³²³ Int. (name withheld), 12.3.2011

terms of tithes. In my research I found no evidence to support these allegations.³²⁴

"Dogmatic" Attitude

There are some Christians who hold a "dogmatic" attitude and declare that each religion has its own sphere and should therefore be left to function separately. These Christians participate in dual religiosity because they do not think that one religion is inferior to the other, but that each of the two religions, Christianity and ATR, has its own function, depending on the demands of life. From the stories gathered for this study, some Christians did not problematize their involvement in ATR because they believe that everything is a gift from God for the wellbeing of humankind. Concerning the issue of diviners and herbalists, some Christians claim that those are gifts from God, and the knowledge these practitioners have also comes from God. Some further claimed that even the power to heal that comes from traditional medicine comes from God. Many Christians testified to have received what they wanted based on the help they sought either from traditional healers or ancestral spirits as the case may be. For instance, those who needed healing sometimes received it, those who needed protection, they got it, those who needed children sometimes got them, those who sought love, employment, promotion, prosperity would sometimes get them, and those who lost their children, animals, property, found them. So if it was not God, who provided all these?

There are some who stated that the elements of ATR that deal with healing and divination are a gift from God and are not at war with Christianity. Some did express that their conscience was clear when they consulted *nchimi* for various reasons. Some Christians indicated that traditional healing and bio-medical healing must work hand in hand; they complement one another. Patrick, a Medical Assistant, emphatically stated this.

Cultural Orientation

This is the level where what is dual may simply be perceived as cultural, and Christians do not regard it as indulging in dual religiosity. During my field research, some Christians appeared not to see anything wrong with what they were doing and were happy to say that it is cultural. What they do is what was passed down from their grandparents and they must practice it so that it does not die. This brings up the idea that has been repeated over

³²⁴ The situation is here similar to witchcraft accusations where people frequently take the accusation as proof of facts.

and over again that African Traditional Religion cannot be separated from everyday life and as a result, some Christians have tough time separating what is religion and what is culture, or more so, they do not really need to separate them. They take things for granted so that the issue of separation does not even arise.

For example, when my grandfather (from my mother's side) passed away, I was away in Kenya and was unable to attend the funeral. My parents did send a message through my husband to inform me of his demise to avoid *mabika*.³²⁵ My grandfather and I were very close, probably because my mother was his first-born child and I happened to be the first-born child of my mother—his first grandchild. When I returned to my home country two years later, I went to my village to offer my condolences as is the custom. Afterwards, my parents asked me if I had been experiencing anything peculiar in my life since the demise of my grandfather and were surprised to hear that I did not experience anything. They expected to hear stories of how my grandfather came to me in dreams or some other messages to that effect, because he loved me so much. Then, my parents felt it was necessary for me to see my grandfather's grave as is the custom. We had to travel for fifty kilometres to my mother's home to see where he was laid to rest. I was told that this was good for me so that I could live in 'peace', to avoid being disturbed by him in my sleep, although I had told them that he never did. We arrived there, and my mother's older cousin (male) took me by the hand, with my mother following behind, to the gravesite. We stood a few metres away, and my uncle warned the 'grandfather' and others lying there that we were approaching him. We knelt beside the tomb while my mother watched from a distance. My uncle addressed my grandfather and explained why we were there, why I was not able to attend his funeral, and asked for his blessings upon me and my family. Prior to the ritual, my uncle had asked for some money, which he said he would place on the tomb. I had paper money but he went into the house to exchange it with coins.³²⁶

³²⁵ *Mabika* is a condition in which one experiences strange or bad things happening in his or her life because a close relative has passed away and is not aware. It is widely believed among the Ngonde that if news about the death of a close relative is hidden from someone, he can be involved in an accident, can have bad dreams, or people may shout at him without any valid reason; it is like things may not work well for you. It is as if the spirit of the departed takes it upon itself to notify you using uncomfortable means. Knowledge of the departure of someone to the ancestral land is important for the Ngonde.

³²⁶ When I asked him why coins, he said that it is the custom, that is what is used from as long as he could remember. Perhaps coins are used to avoid the money

The ritual was very brief but important for my mother and uncle, and probably me.

The three of us, my mother, my uncle and myself, are Christians. My mother (Presbyterian) and my uncle (New Apostolic Church) are committed Christians in good standing with their churches. I was also a committed Presbyterian Christian at that time. What we performed was a religious ritual, but at the same time, it was cultural. This had to be done for the wellbeing of my family and me following the demise of my grandfather who loved me so much. If you ask my mother whether she was practicing dual religiosity, she will say no, it is culture. She does not see any religion in it. In addition, her church does not teach anything concerning visiting the tomb of dead people as being unacceptable. Having participated in the ritual, I did not feel like I had compromised my faith I felt that it is one of the things I was expected to do, although my heart was not in it.³²⁷ Therefore, it is possible that many Christians at all the levels discussed in this study are involved in dual religiosity at a cultural level. Such participation comes naturally, without them having thought about what they are going to do because it is their cultural orientation.

Reluctant Dual Religiosity

Many stories that Christians share show that some were involved in dual religiosity reluctantly, after weighing the options. This is evidenced by the struggles that some Christians testified to have had experienced after their involvement in traditional elements. Reluctance in involvement is also seen in the time taken before one could consult, for example, a diviner, in the case of illness. Some Christians did not rush to traditional healers but took time to consult medical doctors, appealed to prayers (which in some cases included exorcism), and after that long struggle, they reluctantly consulted *nchimi*. In some cases their involvement was induced by the nature of the

from being blown away, or a coin does not decay. However, some people told me that the money placed on the tomb is not left there for good, but the elders do collect the money themselves. After the ritual, they may stay behind for a while in order to collect the money. (This must not be interpreted as stealing, as the spirits have already accepted the spiritual side of the money offered to them, just as much as they don't eat the lumps of food offered to them, with the ants tasked to dispose of the physical part of the food. But the ants have problems to dispose of cash).

³²⁷ This feeling is based on the nature of the ritual that I was involved in. If it were something serious, that touched on my faith, it would have been different.

illness and its perceived causes, while in others pressure from relatives compelled them to reluctantly get involved in dual religiosity.

Dual religiosity exists among the Ngonde and this chapter has discussed how some Christians participate in it. The dual religiosity of the Ngonde takes many forms and occurs at various levels. There are also differences in dual religiosity with some doing it on a regular basis while others participate occasionally. It has been established, though, that personal faith in Jesus Christ and experience of conversion reduces people's involvement in dual religiosity. Those who are more involved may be referred to as nominal Christians. Many Christians, including church leaders, admitted to have been involved in elements of African Traditional Religion before they became 'born again', or before they knew *ubwanaloli* (the truth). However, after knowing the truth, they stopped. Even those who did not mention anything about being born again, but are active and committed Christians, were less involved. Many attested to the fact that after knowing the truth, they stopped involving themselves in traditional elements because they felt that their faith was compromised in the process. However, this does not mean that they could not be tempted, because it was in times of crisis that some, including those who claimed to be born again, attested to have been involved in ATR elements.

Chapter 4: Church Leaders and ATR Beliefs and Practices

This chapter discusses the attitudes that various Christian churches¹ among the Ngonde have and their reactions towards those who are involved in African Traditional Religious beliefs and practices. The data collected so far shows that some churches are more tolerant towards ATR beliefs and practices than others.² It is noteworthy that when the missionaries introduced Christianity to Africa, many of them condemned most of the ATR elements and labelled them pagan or heathen. Due to the hard stand that was taken by some of the missionaries towards traditional beliefs and practices, some Ngonde influential figures broke away from the mission initiated churches and started their own churches which were indigenous. Their aim was to give members freedom to hold their traditional beliefs and the rituals that went along with them. This saw the birth of the Last Church of God and his Christ by Jordan Msumba and Silwani Ngemela (commonly known as BaNgemela) and African National Church founded by Paddy Nyasulu which flourished in Ngonde.³

¹ This is a blanket term for the various Christian denominations in this study. I am aware that Bible Believers claim to be non-denominational, but they are still part of my study.

² This tolerance is sometimes based on one's perception. There were incidences where church members claimed that the church had no problems with certain elements of ATR while the church leadership had a different opinion.

³ It is noteworthy that it is no longer the case these days. There has been a change in how much of the traditional religious elements these churches can accept into the church. For example, the Last Church of God did allow polygamy, and at times promoted it, but now discourages it. See Wezi Gondwe, *The Last Church of God and His Christ: A History of Munkhokwe, Msondozi, Katoto and Munkhokwe Last Reformed Church of God and His Christ*, MA Module, Mzuzu University, 2010, and also Wezi Gondwe, *A History of the Last Church of God and His Christ in Malawi from 1916 to 2015*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2015. While this is the case in Nkhata-bay, the situation is different in some Last Churches in Karonga. A pastor of Rukuru Last Church indicated that a man could marry up to four wives, and he must follow the procedure, which he did not specify (Int. 19.3.2012). The Preacher of Mbepo Last Church in Karonga also confirmed the same (Int. Japhet Mwekinda, 21.3.2012). What is clear from the changes is that they no longer have

A Variety of Attitudes

Research has shown that many Christians, regardless of denomination, do participate in dual religiosity at various levels especially in the areas of healing, rain calling (*chikungu*), identification of witches/wizards and other issues related to witchcraft. Almost all the churches (95%) whose leaders were interviewed indicated that their members are involved in ATR elements in one way or the other. It must be noted, though, that there were differences depending on one's level of commitment and involvement in duality. It is not that members of all churches under study were involved at equal levels. Some were more prone to it than others. The leaders whose churches do not favour African traditional religious practices admitted that the church is finding it difficult to stamp out the practice of dual religiosity.

Churches have different attitudes and react differently towards those who participate in ATR practices. Some churches display a total rejection of ATR elements while others exercise partial rejection. And yet others do not seem to care whether members participate or not. It is noteworthy that some of the reactions that the churches display are vestiges of the missionary attitudes, especially for those churches which were started by missionaries. For the African Initiated Churches, there seems to be a shift from a more tolerant position towards the practices to a less tolerant one.⁴

It is vital to note that there were differences also in the responses that came from the leaders of the same church in rural Karonga and in urban Karonga. This resulted from the fact that either the leaders in the rural areas are not well versed in matters pertaining to their church and were not sure what to say, or that there is no uniformity in the way they do things, or that there is autonomy of the churches. Higher educational levels in Karonga urban may also account for some differences. Differences may also

the freedom to practice traditional religious beliefs as it was intended during the establishment of the church.

⁴ The African International Church pastor showed me the constitution which his church uses. African International Church, which advocates the observance of "African religion with its traditions, laws and customs" (*The Constitution and Rules of A.I.C. n.d.*), is now disciplining its members for participating in some of the traditions like the *chikungu* ritual and even going to *nchimi* for divination (Int. Rev. W.J. Kumwenda, Mwanganda African International Church, 17.3.12). Similarly, the Last Church deters its members from participating in activities that have anything to do with ancestral spirits (Int. Preacher Japhet Mwekinda, Mbepo Last Church, 21.3.12 and Pastor Bwanausi Ndembo, Rukuru Last Church, 19.3.2012.). This is a departure from what one would expect to see happening in these churches.

come in because of the variety in the numbers of members in the churches. In a church with big numbers and few ministers (like Roman Catholic), leniency is expected.⁵ Some churches are moving away from what is laid down in the constitution of the church and use their discretion when dealing with issues, while others follow their dated constitutions to the letter. Below are some of the approaches that are taken by various churches towards those who are reported or admit to have been involved in ATR beliefs and practices.

Rejectional Approaches

Some churches do take rejectional approaches towards dual religious involvement. The rejectional approach demonstrates itself in two forms: total rejection and partial rejection.

Total Rejection

Many Christian churches do not condone any involvement in the traditional religious elements regardless of the situation a Christian is in; even during times of crisis.⁶ Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are among such churches. However, top among the list are the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. In Karonga, they include the Karonga Living Waters Church, Karonga Church on the Wings, Kingdom Gospel Church, Winners Chapel, Christian Love Church, Pentecostal Holiness Association and Karonga Assemblies of God.⁷ When the leaders were asked about their perception of ATR elements, they reject them, describing them as demonic, unscriptural, satanic and idol worship. Their members are encouraged to believe in God alone and not to waver in their faith. Having faith in

⁵ Bishop Mtumbuka stated in an interview I had with him that leniency is exercised in some cases due to weak administration. In addition, the big numbers also play a role because they are difficult to manage. To solve this problem, the Roman Catholic Church in Karonga divides the church into small groups for easy monitoring. This will help people not to hide because they know one another. The *uzengezgani* leaders are encouraged to report cases of indiscipline to the top leadership. Int. Bishop Mtumbuka, Karonga Diocese, 20.12.2013.

⁶ The fact that the churches express total rejection does not mean that their members do not participate in ATR elements.

⁷ It must be noted that these churches were established in Karonga in the 1990s and in 2000s and their numbers are relatively small; Living Waters Church (1993), Assemblies of God (1997), Church on the Wings (2009), Kingdom Gospel Church (1998), Winners Chapel (2010), and Christian Love Church (2006).

ancestral spirits and other traditional religious elements in addition to the Christian faith is dual religion.

Apart from the Pentecostal churches, other churches including Seventh-day Adventists,⁸ Anglican Church, the Bible Believers and Zion Christian Church⁹ also reject any involvement in ATR practices, especially those related to healing. Nevertheless, the Zionists do not only reject healing in ATR but other aspects too.¹⁰

These churches express their rejection in many ways. First, the rejection is expressed through printed documents, or books containing fundamental beliefs of their denomination. The Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches have catechisms which present the church doctrines in question and answer form.¹¹ Secondly, rejection is expressed through teaching. This

⁸ The Seventh-day Adventist Church is very strong on teaching its members material that is directly related to ATR. For example, *Nkhokwe ya ulaliki*, by Wilbert Colonel Mwale, published on behalf of the Malawi Union covers a wide range of topics; it has a lesson, Sambiro no. 66 *Maluso A Akunja* (Heathen Traditions), which deals with such issues. It states that heathen traditions are lies from the devil and are defiling. They constitute idol worship which is prohibited by God Ex 20: 3-5, and they spoil one's behaviour Deut 4:15-19, they are cursed, Deut 27:15, they are useless, Isaiah 44:9-20, and they are tantamount to idol worship which implies that you worship Satan, Psalm 106: 36, 37; 1 Cor. 10:20. Idol worship is condemned by God; those who worship idols don't worship God. In addition, SDA has clear rules in the "28 Fundamental Beliefs."

⁹ Even though there is a historical link between Zionist and Pentecostal denominations in Malawi, Pentecostals do not regard Zionists as saved and therefore do not fellowship with them. Some feel that Zionists lean more towards ATR than Pentecostalism. For a thorough study see Ulf Strohehn, *Pentecostalism in Malawi: A History of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Malawi 1931 - 1994*, Zomba: Kachere, 2005; Ulf Strohehn, *The Zionist Churches in Malawi: History-Theology-Anthropology*, PhD, University of Malawi, 2010 and Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2016.

¹⁰ For instance, Karonga Zion Christianity Church leaders stated that the church discourages its members from practicing witchcraft and anything to do with ATR elements because God detests idol worship. Those involved are disciplined, for not trusting God. Int. Pastor/Prophet Shout Mwandepeka and Assistant Pastor Riford Mwalukazingo, 19.3.2012.

¹¹ The Catechism for the Roman Catholic Church clearly addresses the issues of superstition, divination and magic under the first commandment "You shall have no other gods before me." For instance, the catechism states that "all forms of *divination* are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future" (Deut. 18:10; Jer 29:8). Article I, No. 2116 in "The Catholic Catechism," www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-

teaching is done through various fora: church sermons, different groupings in the churches, or Bible Studies. Some churches make a deliberate effort to teach specific topics which address issues of Christianity and ATR. The teachings do expose such issues and in most cases condemn ATR elements as pagan worship.¹² In some cases the ATR issues at hand are not directly addressed in the Bible, and the churches inappropriately lump them under idolatry.¹³ Thirdly, rejection is expressed through church discipline which takes many forms: rebuke, admonition, suspension, and in extreme cases, excommunication.

Partial Rejection

A number of Christian churches display partial rejection to involvement in ATR related practices. It must be mentioned that those who practice a rejectional approach seem to tolerate certain kinds of involvement in what may be considered ATR practices such as traditional healing. Most churches appear to have a positive view of traditional healing especially that obtained from herbalists because it is believed that God may be working through them to bring healing to the people. It can be God given just like the bio-medical healing or treatment; recognizing that other things can be used to enhance life in the community. The church welcomes good herbal medicine and honest knowledgeable traditional healers, because such healers are carrying out the work of Christ by restoring wholeness to people. Healers are open to anyone who is sick just as Christ was. They create joy for people.

Some do have a prescription of practices its members can participate in and which ones they must avoid. For instance, when it comes to traditional healing, some of the churches that fall under this category allow members to consult herbalists but not *nchimi*.¹⁴ Traditional medicines without any additions or accompaniments are allowed. In fact, some churches teach about traditional medicines: how they work in the body. It is believed that

teachings/what-we-believe/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm# (4.3.2013).

¹² Examples include Assemblies of God, Living Waters and Church on the Wings.

¹³ For example, the *chikungu* ritual, moving around with a charm in the pocket, etc.

¹⁴ The reasons given include the fact that divination is idol worship; it is like worshipping other Gods since spirits are involved.

some roots can heal without any superstitious additions.¹⁵ In some cases, members are encouraged to plant certain trees/plants which could serve as medicine.¹⁶ However, some churches allow their members to consult *nchimi* to get the medicine but without conducting any divination. Partial rejection includes turning a blind eye towards participation in other ATR practices such as the rain calling ritual, *chikungu*.¹⁷ Churches like Presbyterian, Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi,¹⁸ Anglican Church, Moravian Church, Christian Love, and New Apostolic Faith, belong here.

At times there has been tension between some of these churches and their members on involvement in ATR elements. There has been tension between the teachings of the church and the desire for the Ngonde people to live their traditional beliefs which are at times religious in nature. It appears that the tension is much higher in the Presbyterian Church than in others. A good case in point is what happened at one of the Presbyterian Churches in Karonga in 2010. A Medical Assistant at one of the health

¹⁵ Even some Christian organizations such as *Anamed* (Action for Natural Medicine) promote use of traditional medicine. The organization aims at enabling people to become as self-reliant as possible, particularly with regard to their health. The organization achieves its aim by listening to traditional healers, conducting its own research and developing recipes for treatments. See Hans-Martin Hirt and Keith Lindsey, *Natural Medicine in the Tropics II: Treatments: A Seminar Handbook, Treatment of Common Ailments and Uses of some Important Plants in the Tropics*, Third Edition, August 2007, Order no. 109.

¹⁶ Int. Pastor Naboth Fungo, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi, Karonga Congregation 12.3.2012; Int. Pastor Dedani Mkandawire, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi, Ngerenge Parish, 21.3.2012; Int. Mwangonde, Christian Love Church, 14.3.2012.

¹⁷ This is not to say that members are allowed to participate in the *Chikungu* ritual, but some of the churches do not reprimand those who participate, and as such members think that the church sanctions it.

¹⁸ This church started in Karonga in 1986 (Int. Pastor Naboth Fungo) and the current membership is at 320. The church teaches about traditional medicines and how they work in one's body. The church encourages the use of traditional medicine which does not have any attachments with the spiritual world. Members are encouraged to trust God above everything else and they use the Bible and catechism to do that. In the catechism one of the questions concerns the 10 commandments which is translated in Tumbuka: Question, '*Mungawanga na wa chiuta wanyake padela pa ine, kasi ichi chikung'anamulachi?*' (You shall have no other gods but me, what does it mean? Answer: "*Tikwenera kumopa, nakutemwa, nakugomezga mwa chiuta kujumpha vyose.*" (We have to fear, love and trust in God above everything else). "Katekisma Muchoko wa Dr. Martin Luther: 1529").

centres, a member of New Apostolic Faith Church, fell ill and became the centre of the controversy. The Medical Assistant's illness took a long time and after consulting a traditional healer it was discovered that he was being bewitched by village members for his pride and favouritism. The village headman sat with his elders and decided to invite a *nchimi* to come and cleanse the village of witches. The village headman, who is a Christian and a church elder, was in attendance to ensure that people in his village attended the function. Christians were in a dilemma because their churches teach that they should not participate in such exercise and yet the village headman wanted obedience from everyone, whether Christian or non-Christian, and if Christian regardless of their church beliefs or doctrines. The Christians were part of the church community as well as part of the village community. Clearly some participated because they believed in it; they would only not do it because the church tells members not to. Following this cleansing exercise, the Presbyterian Church suspended seventy-six members because they were involved in the exercise.¹⁹ These participated because it was a directive from the village head. 'Be searched or get out of the village.' The Pastor from the Presbyterian Church was angry about the decision the village headman made, and tried to stop it. Every effort to prevent CCAP members and other Christians from being searched was interpreted as an attempt to challenge the authority of the chief and to break down the village structure.

The seventy-six were suspended for four months because they were forced by their village headman to be searched by a diviner. When they were summoned by the discipline committee, they admitted to have been searched on instruction from the village headman. The church went ahead to suspend them. When I talked to two of them, they explained that the church was justified to suspend them because they disobeyed the rules, but at the same time, they felt that it was unfair because it was not their wish to participate; they were afraid of the consequences from the village head. The church leaders, however, defended their action by saying that the church members should have resisted, just like Shadreck, Misheck and Abednego refused to worship other gods regardless of the consequences.²⁰

It was alleged that the village headman, who was a Christian and church elder himself, was not suspended. Some claimed that he refused to be

¹⁹ CCAP Church Minutes (name of congregation withheld), August, 2010.

²⁰ Int. Elesia Nakalengo (not real name), church elder, Kasoba CCAP Church, 18.12.2012. The story about Shadreck, Misheck and Abednego is found in Daniel 3:1-30.

suspended, while others claimed that he was not suspended at all. The other elders were afraid of submitting his name for suspension because he is the village head. It appears that the village head had authority over the church in his village. It is alleged that he told the church elders "don't include my name on the list of those to be suspended" and no one could dare to do it. It is very likely that his name was not submitted out of respect; since village heads are much respected in Ngonde society.

The Presbyterian Church, just like other churches which exercise partial rejection, is keen on dealing with overt cases but is not in control of what people do privately. For instance, people were suspended because they were seen openly participating in this exercise, some against their wishes. However, people secretly go to *nchimi* to be searched without the knowledge of the church. Visits to *nchimi* are discouraged with the argument that they work in conjunction with ancestral spirits, evil spirits and demons. This could partly be true because all the *nchimi* I interviewed are known by spiritual names.²¹

A cursory look at church minute books of Mpata CCAP church shows that the problem of *kusecha* and *kusecheka* is a common problem that the CCAP church is dealing with.²² In one of the discipline reports, under the section of those suspended (*abakwepusiwa*), there were thirteen of them. This is how it is presented, "Aba babukire kubulaghusi bali 13: ma church elder 3, ma deacon 4, abakristi 6."²³ Out of the thirteen, seven were church leaders (elders and deacons). Church minutes of Mpata CCAP also show that in July, 2011, six people, four females and two males were suspended for *bulaghusi* (divination).²⁴

²¹ *Nchimi* are known by *ingamu ya bughanga*. Examples of those I met have names like Prophet Mikaya, Sekani, Suzika, and Ufyaghile, just to mention a few. This is not common among herbalists. The name is derived from the spirit that came upon them at the initial time of beginning their work.

²² However, there are differences among CCAP congregations. For instance, Karonga CCAP did not have any discipline cases to do with *kusecheka* or divination 2008 to 2009. Karonga Session Minute Book (25/10/06 – 28/11/09). This could be a sign that people are no longer participating in ATR elements or that the CCAP is tolerating the participation.

²³ Those who went for divination (to be searched) were 13; 3 church elders, 4 deacons, and 6 Christians (church members). Eight of the thirteen were female. Mpata CCAP Session Minute No. 48, minutes of 27th June, 2009.

²⁴ Mpata CCAP Minutes, Minute 323 of July, 2011

A pastor of Kasoba African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) explained that members are given more freedom compared to other churches, especially mainline churches.²⁵ People are allowed to participate in the *chikungu* rain-calling ritual if need arises, visit traditional healers if they are ill (but not *nchimi*), and to consult ancestors if they have any problems. Those who go to *nchimi* are counselled, not suspended like it happens in other churches.²⁶ It is believed that God himself is the one who removes people from the church and man should not take the place of God. Man should not judge on behalf of God. The pastor noted that he counsels more *nchimi* visitors than any other cases in his church, because that is the highest temptation that members are faced with in the event of illness, death and other problems. The pastor refuted the idea that people go to *nchimi* because the church is not meeting their needs, but attributed it to lack of faith in God. He said that they need more teaching.

Another church that takes the counselling approach is Kabale Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi (ELCM). The pastor emphasized that their teachings are based on the Bible and some cultural practices are not compatible with their teachings. He said that, while members are allowed to consult traditional healers to get treatment, divination is not allowed. Divination is regarded as idolatry—guided by evil spirits. Those who consult diviners and are reported to the church are counselled and taught. Those who decide to camp at the diviner's compound are suspended.²⁷ The same is true when members participate in ancestral veneration or in activities related to death that are "against the Bible". The pastor pointed out that those who do these things are ignorant and have to be taught with love so that they understand how that may compromise their faith.

A Gulupa/Catechist of the Roman Catholic Church stated that Christians are allowed to get medication from the traditional healers but no divination is allowed. That divination is not allowed is also confirmed by the Roman

²⁵ Int. Pastor NN, Kasoba AMEC, 4.3.2011.

²⁶ It is important to note that churches which exercise partial rejection react differently to offenders. Some use the legal way to deal with them, through suspension (which tends to drive people away), while others use the counselling approach (which is more pastoral, trying to help people).

²⁷ Int. Pastor NN, Kabale Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi, 4.3.2011. There are three powerful diviners within his neighbourhood who have admission facilities (*makambi*). Such being the case, the temptation for members to visit them is quite high.

Catholic Catechism.²⁸ The Catechist continued to say that divination disturbs peace in the villages, because the names of one or two people will be mentioned as to have been responsible for causing illness or death, as the case may be. Those who go for divination suspend themselves, for the church does not suspend people. But when cases are reported to him, he goes to counsel the person. He also believes that people consult diviners because they do not know the truth, so it is important to counsel and teach them so that they understand that what they are doing is wrong and against biblical teaching.²⁹ The top leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Karonga, Bishop Martin Mtumbuka, described divination as something that takes one's faith away from Jesus Christ, something not to be entertained, and pleaded that members need to understand that.³⁰ The official teaching clearly shows that the church is against ATR practices that end up compromising one's faith.

Laissez Faire Approach³¹

Some churches do not seem to care about what their members are doing. Even when church rules prohibit members, nothing is done practically to enforce the rules or take to task those who violate them. An example is the Church of Christ. The church leader who was interviewed said that it is up to the individual. The church does not pay attention to whether its members are involved in ATR practices. He said that he had never seen anyone disciplined or suspended for that in his ten years of service.³² Another church which might partly be considered to be taking a laissez faire approach towards ATR involvement is the Roman Catholic Church. Various respondents from the Roman Catholic Church did indicate that when one violates some of the church's teachings like consulting diviners; it is up to the individual to go to the priest to confess. In this case, one's conscience is

²⁸ The Roman Catholic Catechism condemns divination, which is done for purposes of restoring health, and the church warns its faithful against it. One becomes an idolater by paying allegiance to such things. Article I, No. 2117 in "The Catholic Catechism," www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm# (4.3.2013).

²⁹ Int. Patrick Mwakiyale (Catechist), St. Michael Roman Catholic Church, 5.3.2011.

³⁰ Int. Bishop Martin Mtumbuka, Karonga Diocese, 20.12.2012.

³¹ The laissez faire approach in this context refers to the church's reaction only; it does not imply that the church allows members to do as they please. Church documents such as the catechism (for the Roman Catholic Church), do state clearly that involvement in some ATR practices, such as divination, is prohibited.

³² Int. Preacher Robert Simkonda, Church of Christ, 14.3.2012.

the guiding principle, and if he chooses to disobey it, no one will force him or her to confess it and repent.³³

The laissez faire approach can also be interpreted from the silence of the church on ATR issues. If the church does not teach, or rarely teaches about these issues, Christians may think that it is acceptable to participate in them. One of the weaknesses that were pointed out by one of the church leaders was that the church does not teach against ATR practices. Therefore the church cannot be hard on Christians who are involved.³⁴ A CCAP church leader also pointed out that the church appears to be passive in teaching about ATR practices, but very quick in disciplining offenders.³⁵

Affirming Approach

Some churches such as Last Church of God and his Christ,³⁶ African National Church, and African International Church are more affirming to ATR elements. Traditional Authority (TA) Karonga stated that black churches are more tolerant towards Malawian culture than missionary churches.³⁷ Formerly the Last Church and the African National Church drew their members from those who were suspended from mission churches, which accused them of living like pagans. "Africa is in need of church that would correspond with her God given customs and manners."³⁸ Belief number three of the constitution of the African International Church states:

We believe in fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man regardless of creed, and that the African religion with its traditions,

³³ This is based on the fact that a Christian sometimes goes to the diviner in secret and the church leaders may not know about it, but God does. In this case, the Christian has the responsibility to make things right with God through confession and repentance.

³⁴ Int. Father Denis Chitete, Vicar General of Karonga Diocese, 14.3.2012.

³⁵ Int. Rev. L. Nyondo, General Secretary, Livingstonia Synod, 15.3.13.

³⁶ For more on their beliefs and practices see Wezi Gondwe, *The Last Church of God and His Christ: A History of Munkhokwe, Msondozi, Katoto and Munkhokwe Last Reformed Church of God and His Christ*, MA Module, 2010. The Last Church is undergoing a modernizing process, which pushes back "African" practices (Wezi Gondwe, *A History of the Last Church of God and His Christ in Malawi from 1916 to 2015*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2015).

³⁷ Int. Wilford Mwamatope (T.A. Karonga), 22.11.2011. He is also the area Bishop of the Last Church of God and his Christ.

³⁸ Int. Rev. W.J. Kumwenda, Mwanganda African International Church, 17.3.2012

laws and customs was constituted by him, so that the African may realize him by their observance.³⁹

Some churches do not care what their members are doing provided they show up at their church for worship and give their offerings to the church. They do not follow up individuals' private lives. For instance, African International Church (AIC) does not care whether one participates in ancestral veneration or consults *nchimi*, but of course they will suspend one who goes to a *nchimi* and then comes back to fight with the person mentioned to have caused the illness or death. If a *nchimi* comes to a village for a witch-cleansing ritual—to search people for *nyanga*—the church will suspend any person caught with *nyanga* (charms). This shows that African International Church does affirm ATR practices and uses some of the practices to validate the practices of its members because they are interested to know the results so that they can take appropriate action on the culprit (their member). It would be interesting to note that outside ATR practices, African International Church had no problems with polygamy, like other Christian churches and the only requirement is that one has to wed in the church. The one who elopes (a fifth or sixth wife) will be suspended for eloping, not for marrying a fifth or sixth wife.⁴⁰

Another church that appears to tolerate some traditions related to ATR is the Roman Catholic Church. The tolerance is also evidenced by the silence that some Roman Catholic churches exercise because members are not taught about ATR and such a silence may be interpreted that it is all right for people to participate in them.

The Official Dual Involvement

The affirming approach towards ATR practices is evident at official levels. As pointed out earlier in this book, some chiefs and some village heads, including *chikungu* ritual leaders, are Christians but at the same time are also leaders of the community in which they live. When such leaders go to church, they are not sent away, or disciplined, out of respect, even when the church leaders are aware of their involvement in ATR practices.

Leadership Level

An affirming approach may also result from the fact that church leaders advise members to participate in dual religious activities even when they

³⁹ The Constitution and Rules of the ANC Mission, n.d (*Lufura Iwa AIC*). This is the constitution that is currently in use.

⁴⁰ Int. Fywell Mvula, Pastor, Gwebu African International Church, 18.12.2011.

are fully aware that the church teaching does not allow that. For example, Elefasi Nambara, a member of the Presbyterian Church explained that she has a child who had a protracted illness, suffering from epilepsy. She and her husband sought help from various doctors but the child could not be healed. One of the church elders advised her to go to a traditional healer if she wanted her child's case to be dealt with, once and for all. So, Nambara consulted a diviner and she got the help she needed.

Some leaders are dual, and they act as examples for members to follow. One pastor shared his experience when he was posted to one of his church's stations in the rural area. When he arrived at the place, he was welcomed by church leaders. When he instructed the people to take his property into the house, the church clerk stopped him and took the pastor aside. The clerk told the pastor that they needed to sprinkle some traditional protective medicine as it was the tradition of that place. The pastor refused to have the house sprinkled, but the clerk informed him that other pastors before him allowed it; otherwise he would not sleep at night. The pastor resisted it, but true to the clerk's word, he found himself sleeping on his bed outside the house at 1.00 a.m. He did not know how he got himself out there and who took him outside. He suspected that it was the work of witches and wizards.⁴¹

Church Discipline

The church is mandated by the Bible to carry out discipline. Almost every church practices discipline to ensure that every member is in good standing with the church. Church discipline refers to the rules of governing a church on one hand, but also the punishment that is meted out on those who violate the rules on the other hand. The aims of discipline are that God may be honoured, that the purity and welfare of the ministry may be maintained, and that those under discipline may be brought to repentance and restoration.⁴² Church discipline is carried out to benefit both the church and the one disciplined, through "the exercise of the authority which the

⁴¹ It may be argued that there is a psychological explanation for this. The pastor might have done it in his sleep. However for a Ngonde, witchcraft is a reality and often there is no better explanation for what happened than witchcraft.

⁴² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, pp. 894-895.

Lord Jesus Christ has given to the church to promote its purity, to benefit the offender and to vindicate the honour of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁴³

There are two types of church discipline: formative and corrective discipline. Formative discipline deals with discipleship seeking to help form character in the life of the believer. This is related to preventive discipline. Corrective discipline is a response to some perceived wrong, whether in action or in doctrine. This type of discipline is carried out in different ways depending on the rules or policies of the church, and the gravity of the issue at hand. A rebuke or counselling would fall into this category. In some cases one is suspended for a period of time.⁴⁴ In other cases, the extreme form of corrective discipline, excommunication, is used. This is where the offender is banished from the church community until such time as he or she repents or recants.⁴⁵ Any kind of church discipline is carried out to preserve the purity of the church. The discipline invites the person to change behaviour or attitude, to repent and return to full communion.

Those who practice rejectional approaches (be it total or partial) to involvement in ATR practices tend to be very strict on church discipline. For example, the Presbyterian Church disciplines its members when they are openly involved in these practices, the commonest form of discipline being suspension.⁴⁶ One of the ATR practices that many members in CCAP church get suspended for is consultation of *nchimi* (diviners). Archival research of records of Livingstonia CCAP church shows that this idea of *nchimi* consultation is a long standing issue. My study of the archival sources show that most discipline cases from 1978-1981 had to do with adultery, un-

⁴³ Eric Stoddart, "Excommunication in Contemporary Scotland," n.p. May, 2004.

⁴⁴ In fact, some authors like Jack Thompson define discipline as "the process of suspension from church membership." See "The History of Church Discipline in the Livingstonia Synod," Seminar Paper, 1974.

⁴⁵ Excommunication is very rare in Malawi, though the term is sometimes used loosely for suspension.

⁴⁶ "The censures of the church are admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition from office and ex-communication and are administered only on confession or proof of sin or offence." However, the church does not practice ex-communication even though it has it on paper. *Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synod of Livingstonia Minister's Handbook on Church Government, Practice and Procedure*, Mzuzu: CCAP Synod of Livingstonia, 2009, p. 10. The handbook defines suspension as "a temporary exclusion of a church member from the privileges of sealing ordinances and other rights of membership, including Holy Communion and preaching." Ibid, p. 11.

officiated marriages (ubulogwe) and consultation of diviners. For example one of the minutes item reads "*Inongwa ingulumba yo yakwiyepusya abandu babukile mu nchimi, ukunwa kangu nukutula ubulogwe.*" *Inongwa syosa syo isi sili mwiko kukipanga.*"⁴⁷ From the minutes it appears that the issue of *nchimi* was such a challenge for the CCAP that the moderator and the evangelist and one church elder were sent to meet Chief Kyungu to talk over the issue, and ask for his intervention. During the Kirk Session of August, 1981, the church agreed that they should intensify teaching people not to go for divination because such visits were on the increase. However, in the minutes of the session held on 4th December, 1981, nine Christians were suspended for consulting diviners or for allowing them to come to their homes. Two of the people who were suspended were church elders, people with positions in the church. This happened despite the fact that Chief Kyungu had intervened and teaching was intensified.

In 1982, records show that many people were suspended for consulting *nchimi*. It appears that *nchimi* Chiwayule was a force to reckon with at that time. In February, 1982, a case is recorded in which *nchimi* Chiwayule was invited to do a clean-up exercise in one of the villages. He visited some homes of Christians and when the issue was reported to the church, people refused that Christians were involved. Elders and deacons refused to disclose the names of Christians who participated in the exercise but choir members and the Christians themselves admitted to have participated. The session resolved that the deacons and elders be disciplined especially those who participated in Chiwayule's clean up exercise. The elders were disciplined and stripped of their eldership and they chose others to replace them. Even minutes for Ngerenge congregation for 1950-1969 show that *ubulaghusi* or *kulagula* (divination) was also a problem. It is noteworthy that *nchimi* consultation also had to do with seasons of diviners. When one powerful diviner comes on to the scene, people are shaken and flock to him/her, when he dies or moves away, the rate of consultation diminishes. This was also the case when a new powerful and famous *nchimi*, Chikanga Chunda started his battle against witchcraft.⁴⁸

The Presbyterian Church objects to traditional religious practices because they are perceived as unscriptural. The church suspends its members to be

⁴⁷ "The major task is that of suspending those who went to diviners, drunkenness, and adultery. All these cases are taboo to our church." Kasoba Congregation Session Minutes, Minute 12, 1978-1981.

⁴⁸ For more on Chikanga and his activities as a diviner, see Boston Soko, *Nchimi Chikanga: The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2008.

schooled, and after repentance to welcome them back. This is done because they are an embarrassment to the church; they are nominal Christians. Above all, this is done to preserve the purity of the church. If Christians are allowed to do whatever they like, then there will be chaos in the church.⁴⁹ In addition, people are suspended to give them time to reform.⁵⁰

In general, there is commonality among the various churches under study on the way they carry out corrective discipline, what distinguishes one from the other is the terminology used. For instance, suspension and excommunication are exercised by most churches. Excommunication is a religious censure used to deprive, suspend or limit membership in a religious community, in effect putting someone out of communion.⁵¹

For the Roman Catholics, those who sin must come back and receive the sacrament of reconciliation, confessing their sins. Those who are suspended are still Catholics and remain bound by obligations such as attending mass, although they are barred from receiving the Eucharist and from taking an active part in the liturgy (reading, bringing the offerings etc). For Anglicans, the disciplined must continue attending worship services, but must begin classes to learn more. After that, they go for penitence before the minister and are then restored. As for the Protestants, various denominations have formal policies of shunning, disfellowshipping and excommunication. Their attitude towards ATR is that it is worthless, dangerous and demon-led.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is very strong on church discipline and it gets its mandate from Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Peter 2: 5, 9. It is believed that the church must discipline its members to maintain "its lofty calling of being a

⁴⁹ Int. Rev. Webster Kaisi, Karonga CCAP Church, 19.11.2010.

⁵⁰ For a thorough treatment of discipline and church suspension in the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia, see Timothy Nyasulu, "Bringing the Sheep Back to the Corral:" Moral Discipline in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synod of Livingstonia, Malawi, 1995-2005, PhD, Trinity International University, USA, 2010; Levi Nyondo, Church Suspension in the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia, ThM, University of Aberdeen, 2004.

⁵¹ The Core Bible Believers who are considered to be radical practise this type of church discipline. Visitation to a traditional healer or diviner is punishable by excommunication (Int. Richard Gadama, 20.7.12). For the different groups of Bible Believers see Richard Gadama, *The Bible Believers in Malawi: History, Teachings and Practices (1977-2011)*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2012.

'holy priesthood' and a 'holy nation'.⁵² The church adopts four biblical counsels on discipline. First, it follows Matt 18:15-17 to deal with private offenses. This involves persuading the offender to change his behaviour. If unsuccessful, a second attempt is made, where one is accompanied by one or two unbiased witnesses. If this attempt fails, the matter should be brought before the entire church. If the erring member rejects the wisdom and authority of Christ's church he severs himself from its fellowship. In disfellowshipping the guilty person, the church simply confirms her condition. In dealing with public offenses, shameless and rebellious offenses bringing bad reputation on the church are immediately dealt with by disfellowshipping the offender. Disfellowshipping removes the evil, which otherwise would work like leaven, and it restores the purity of the church and acts as a redemptive remedy for the offender (1 Cor. 5:4, 5, 7). This is done in obedience to what Scripture says, "Expel the wicked man from among you" (1 Cor 3:11, 13). In dealing with divisive persons, a member, who causes divisions and offenses (Rom 16:17), "who walks disorderly," refusing to obey biblical counsel, should be avoided so that "he may be ashamed" of his attitude. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 Thess 3:6, 14, 15). If the divisive man refuses to listen to the second admonition of the church, he should be rejected, knowing that such a person is absorbed in sin, being self-condemned (Titus 3:10). Restoration of offenders is done upon sufficient evidence of genuine repentance (2 Cor. 2:6-10).⁵³

The churches discipline their members for participating in ATR because, contrary to Christian faith, ancestral rites are forbidden because they are offered to spirits of ancestors and so those who participate in them are involved in idolatry and superstition. The same is also said about seeking assistance from diviners because they do it with the help of ancestral spirits or other kinds of spirits.

From the data that was collected from different churches, three patterns of church discipline can be gathered:

Depending on the Level of Maturity

The churches which practice rejectional approaches towards ATR practices take various actions to remedy the situation or to deter others from doing

⁵² *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2nd edition, Silver Spring: Pacific Press, 2005, p. 178.

⁵³ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2nd edition, Silver Spring: Pacific Press, 2005, p. 179.

the same. Among such churches, some Pentecostal churches reported that they carry out church discipline depending on the level of maturity of Christians.⁵⁴ Beginners or those who are newly born again or new converts are treated differently from those who are mature⁵⁵ in Christ. Consideration is made^{for} new converts because they are still learning and might have done that out of ignorance. In addition it is believed that it takes much time and several teachings for one to be firm and strong in the Lord.⁵⁶ Long-time Christians are believed to have learnt and grown in their faith in the Lord, and therefore must know the truth. When a Christian is in the wrong⁵⁷ the church makes a decision whether it should counsel or suspend the member. Therefore, new converts are counselled and mature ones are suspended for a period depending on the case. Thus, mature Christians are given stiffer punishment. Church leaders take advantage of the violation to teach the new converts the truth, during the counselling session(s).

Other churches also make some considerations based on whether one is an ordinary member or a leader in the church. Ordinary members are counselled while those holding leadership positions are suspended.⁵⁸ Leaders are disciplined because it is believed that they know the truth and must be good examples.⁵⁹ For some churches like Last Church, if the offender is a pastor or deacon, he is demoted.⁶⁰

An interview with some of the members showed that they did not like the idea of differentiating between new converts and mature Christians because the definition of sin is one, and God expects everyone to be holy as

⁵⁴ It must be noted here that this depends on the gravity of the case; it does not apply to all cases. For example, those found drinking beer or smoking are counselled, but those guilty of adultery are disciplined, no counselling, whether new convert or mature Christian.

⁵⁵ Mature are those who have been Christians for a long time, and have been taught thoroughly and know the teachings of the Bible and the church.

⁵⁶ Int. Pastor Noria Harawa, Karonga Church on the Wings, 13.3.2012 and Pastor NN, Kingdom Gospel Church, 21.3.2012.

⁵⁷ An example of the wrong being referred to here is consulting a *nchimi*.

⁵⁸ A case in point was when a member of the church who had been a Christian for three months, lost some money and he consulted a diviner to recover his money. When the church leaders learnt about it, they counselled him. However, when one of the long time Christians participated in *chikungu* ritual in 2008/09 rainy season, she was suspended from the church for six months.

⁵⁹ Int. Rev. Aubrey Simtowe, African Methodist Episcopal Church, McAllister Temple, 17.3.2012.

⁶⁰ Int. Preacher Japhet Mwekinda, Mbepo Last Church, 21.3.2012.

he is holy (Lev. 20:26). Some were of the view that new members take advantage of that way and do what their hearts tell them to do hoping that they will not be disciplined. It is argued that the teachings and the rules are the same, and those who become Christians must be careful to obey them. However, others are of the view that to whom much is given, much should also be expected. Those who have more knowledge must make use of the knowledge they have as a tool to resist the temptation of becoming dual religious. Such being the case, they must face stiffer punishment.

Progressive Discipline

While some churches practice a clear cut system of discipline, suspending whoever violates the rules; other churches practice a progressive kind of discipline to deal with wrongdoers.⁶¹ First offenders are counselled or warned against doing evil, while habitual offenders are suspended. If the member persists in doing evil s/he is excommunicated from the church because it shows that one has refused to reform. Churches which practice this kind of discipline include: Mpata Christian Love Church, Mpata Assemblies of God Church, Karonga Assemblies of God, Karonga Seventh-day Adventist Church, Kasantha Seventh-day Church, Zion Christian Church and Karonga Living Waters Church.⁶² It is noteworthy that Bible Believers excommunicate members when they violate some rules, and there is no discussion about it.⁶³

In the case of Living Waters Church, if one admits her wrongdoing, she is counselled and prayed for. However, if one denies to have done wrong, and yet there is evidence that she has, she is suspended for three to six months depending on the case. However, different from what other churches do, when one is suspended, she is not allowed to attend church services or participate in any other activities. One must stay at home until the suspension period elapses or until she repents of her sin. This aspect of

⁶¹ This, however, is dependent on the nature of the discipline case. Some cases may not follow any steps, they just lead straight into excommunication. For example, Seventh-day Adventists and Bible Believers excommunicate those involved in divination.

⁶² Living Waters Church counsels the offender for the first and second time, then third time, suspends the offender. But if one persists in wrong doing, the church excommunicates the concerned. Int. Pastor Runwell Kilembe, 14.3.2012.

⁶³ Such cases include consulting a *ng'anga*, marrying outside the church, even washing a baby with medicated water. Int. Richard Gadama, 20.7.2012. For a detailed study of Bible Believers, see Richard Gadama, *The Bible Believers in Malawi: History, Teachings and Practices (1977-2011)*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2012.

restoration taking place immediately after repentance differs from other churches where repentance, even if very genuine, cannot shorten the length of suspension.

Such a case happened at Gospel Kingdom Church where a committed Christian was guilty of consulting a diviner in search of the fruit of the womb. The woman received all the support she needed from the church in terms of counselling, prayer and fasting for her to have a baby. Three years passed without any and she started panicking. She later on succumbed to the temptation because her marriage was also at stake for the husband was not a committed Christian. She then consulted a diviner who gave her some traditional medicines to help her have a baby. When this issue was reported to the leadership of the church, she was invited and questioned. She admitted to have consulted a diviner and genuinely repented of her wrongdoing. She prayed to God that he should forgive her and pleaded with the church to forgive her as well for going astray. She promised never to consult a diviner again. The church was torn between forgiving her and restoring her into the communion of the church and suspending her. The leadership of the church decided to suspend her, to maintain the purity of the church and to deter others from committing the same offence. It is noteworthy that, generally, there is difference of opinion at what point restoration to the church fellowship should take place. "Some think it should come after a definite period of suspension, others believe it should come after genuine repentance."⁶⁴ Some are of the view that even genuine repentance should be tested with time, to prove that it is indeed genuine.

No Discipline

Some churches do not follow up on what individuals are doing, especially regarding involvement in ATR practices. If an individual feels that he has gone astray, he must come to the leaders to confess his sin. In other words, it is up to the individual. If the individual chooses not to show up and confess, the leaders will not force the individual to do ⁵⁰. No one will invite him to be asked questions about his action. He is answerable to God and must ensure that his relationship with God is good. The understanding is that there is no need to suspend anyone because those who sin suspend themselves from the communion of believers. The sinner knows that he has sinned and should make restitution with his God. Some Roman Catholic Churches do not discipline their members for participating in ATR practices.

⁶⁴ Jack Thompson, *The History of Church Discipline in Livingstonia Synod*, Seminar paper, 1974.

However, the church disciplines its members when they violate other rules such as getting married without seeking the blessing of the clergy.⁶⁵

It is noteworthy that disciplining, suspension or excommunication can take place only when the wrongdoer admits to have violated the biblical teachings. ATR practices are difficult to deal with due to lack of clear evidence. The church leaders always depend on the integrity of the members in admitting to have done wrong. Formative and corrective discipline is being exercised by churches; however the problem of dual religiosity persists.

Ignored Discipline

In some cases, churches may have clear rules of discipline, but do not apply them, or rarely do so. Some apply the rules selectively, highlighting some and ignoring others. This therefore shows that there is a discrepancy between what is on paper and what the church practices. For instance, in the Presbyterian Church, just like in many churches, there are many reasons why members can be disciplined, including: Drinking or brewing any kind of beer/alcohol, smoking tobacco or hemp, polygamy, participating in gambling and ecstatic dances, e.g. *fimbuza*, consulting traditional healers for any type of assistance, eloping a spouse, being absent more than three times at Kirk Session meetings (elders and deacons), stealing, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, working on Sunday, witchcraft, etc.⁶⁶ All these rules are expected to be observed by Christians failing which suspension or excommunication must follow. However, it has been observed that the church has overlooked some cases and instead they are obsessed with issues of self-marriage, adultery and divination. One church minister pointed out that "these are some of the issues the church today should be fighting for to make the post-modern church ministry and mission very effective for all people in all ages."⁶⁷

Some church leaders tend to overlook certain sins because they are not considered as serious. Rev. K.D. of the Anglican Church explained that issues of drinking beer and smoking were emphasized by the missionary churches but there was no biblical basis for Christians not to do so. He believes that the missionaries did that to avoid excessive drinking.

⁶⁵ Int. Truly Kayange (not real name), member, St. Mary's Catholic Parish, 21.3.2012.

⁶⁶ *Constitution and Code of the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia*, Mzuzu: 2001, p. 30.

⁶⁷ Levi Nyondo, *Church Suspension in the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia*, MTh, University of Aberdeen, 2004, pp. 30-31.

The Perspective of those Disciplined

Church discipline is perceived differently by the disciplined and those who carry out the discipline. While some feel that it helps in bringing repentance in some of the offenders, others think that there is need for improvement in the way it should be done.

Discipline is Necessary

Many Christians who were once disciplined indicated that, being a spiritual organization, the church should not be run like a "secular" organization.⁶⁸ However, the pastoral approach, as opposed to legalistic means, was favoured by many of them. One argued that by using legalistic means, the church is like a policeman watching all the time, or waiting to hear something about somebody, and then pouncing on him when he does wrong.⁶⁹ Isaac is of the view that when the church does its part of teaching, members should be left to be in charge of their moral lives. The Holy Spirit will do his work to convict the wrongdoer. I am tempted to agree with Isaac that in some way, the church leaders act more like judges than pastors, punishing without taking into account the offenders' specific situation or repentance.

In addition, church discipline is necessary because, in some ways, it has helped to bring repentance in those who were disciplined. Some members who were once disciplined explained that the experience helped them realize their wrong doing, confess it and begin a new life. A few cases are presented below.

Mrs. D.M.'s Experience

Mrs. D.M., a member of African Methodist Episcopal Church, was the first wife and her husband married another wife. These wives never liked each other. They got jealous of each other in everything. On several occasions, Mrs. D.M. picked a quarrel with her counterpart and fought for some time. On one occasion she injured her badly so that she was taken to the hospital where she was admitted for several days. Mrs. D.M. was counselled and she promised to change for the better. Months later, upon her friend's advice,

⁶⁸ It must be noted here that even secular organizations are not run haphazardly, there are rules and discipline is meted out to offenders. Perhaps the respondent was emphasizing the point that the church needs it more than secular organizations due to the nature of its mission into the world.

⁶⁹ Int. Isaac Mwalwimba, Seventh-day Church, 11.3.2010.

she decided to consult a *nchimi* who gave her medicine to make the second wife walk out of her marriage. The two agreed to go together to the *nchimi* because Mrs. D.M. did not know the exact place. When they returned, Mrs. D.M.'s friend warned the second wife about what Mrs. D.M. was about to do to her, and proceeded to inform the church leadership that Mrs. D.M. consulted *nchimi*, but of course she did not mention that she went with her and that it was her who advised Mrs. D.M. to consult *nchimi*. Since Mrs. D.M. had been counselled on several occasions for her misconduct, the church suspended her for three months in 2006. She testified that the three months' suspension was an important experience; she learnt many things about how she could have a relationship with Christ. She committed her life to Christ and wanted to know more about God. At the end of the period, she was a totally new person. She became very nice to the second wife, and she loved her.

The Case of Hastings Mwalughali

Hastings Mwalughali,⁷⁰ a committed member of Living Waters Church for nine years testified that he was suspended in 2009, for consulting a diviner when his house was broken into, and his property was stolen. This was a third occasion of similar nature. His worker suggested that a diviner should be brought in to recall the property, to which Mwalughali consented. The diviner came and performed his ritual. He assured him that his property would be returned by the thieves in a week's time. This never happened. Mwalughali and his neighbour were members of the same church, and when the neighbour heard that the diviner came to his house, he reported the matter to the church leaders. The pastor did not come but instead sent the church administrator, who counselled Mwalughali and his family. The administrator emphasized the need for him to believe in prayer and put all his trust in God.⁷¹ He was suspended for six weeks. He claimed that the suspension was helpful because it gave him time to reflect on his commitment to Christ and on how much he trusted in him. The counselling that continued for weeks also helped him to understand what it meant to be a committed Christian, after being a member of the church for nine years. He further stated that if it were not for the discipline, he would not possess the knowledge that he now has, which helps him resist the temptation of being involved in such practices.

⁷⁰ Not real name.

⁷¹ He stated that the administrator advised him to read Psalm 20:7-8; Prov. 3:5-6.

Mrs. Mwambelo's Testimony

Mrs. Mwambelo, a member of the Presbyterian Church, was suspended from the church following witchcraft accusations in 2011. One family, also members of the Presbyterian Church, had a child who suffered from protracted illness. This family went to *nchimi* Kawonga who informed them that the child was bewitched by Mrs. Mwambelo. Mrs. Mwambelo was invited to the *nchimi* where it is alleged that she admitted to have done it. This resulted into conflict and the affected family reported the matter to church leaders. Both the affected family members and Mrs. Mwambelo were suspended from the church, for consulting a diviner. It was during suspension that Mrs. Mwambelo repented of her wrongdoing and committed herself to obeying the teachings of God.

Discipline and Pastoral Care

Some respondents pointed out that offenders must be disciplined because if they are left scot free, there will be chaos in the church. However, one pointed out that in many cases, when one goes against the law, it shows that something is wrong and that the individual needs help. In some churches like CCAP often no pastoral care is given to help the individual get back on track.⁷² If one is suspended for three months,⁷³ he simply looks forward to the expiry of the suspension period, but no spiritual assistance is given to the suspended member.⁷⁴ This is in sharp contrast to what happens in the Seventh-day Church where the suspended member is required to go

⁷² In many cases, no effort is made to inquire as to what might have led the Christian to violate the rules. The causes, if known, could guide the church leaders to better assist the offender to get back on track quickly.

⁷³ The CCAP suspension periods are as follows: Ministers (Reverends), seven years, and must reapply for holy ministry; Elders and deacons, Evangelists, six months; church members, three months; and catechumen/hearers class members, three months; even though the suspension periods may be shortened depending on the commitment of the one disciplined. *Constitution and Code of the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia*, 2001.

⁷⁴ Int. NN, Ngerenge CCAP, 11.9.2011. In his story, he narrated that he was suspended from the church for three months for getting married outside the church (popularly known as "self-marriage" in CCAP). He continued to attend church services as a suspended church member for one year, when he decided to request that he be restored back to the fellowship of the church. He claimed that no church leader counselled him or taught him the word of God concerning his issue at home. In this way, discipline appears to benefit the church more than the suspended member.

through Bible classes so that he is thoroughly taught.⁷⁵ Readmission to church membership is normally preceded by rebaptism.⁷⁶ Apart from the Seventh-day church, the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches are strong in the area of pastoral care. This may be due to manageable numbers and as such church leaders have time for everyone. It may also arise from their understanding of the role of church leadership when one is serving discipline.⁷⁷ The idea is that one goes astray because he lacks knowledge and understanding, and that the church must help him understand biblical teachings.

Discipline as a Routine

Some perceive discipline to be ineffective, because it is done as a routine. This is especially the case where discipline by the book is exercised. In this kind of discipline, when one goes against the rules, he is suspended, and when the set period is over, the member is welcomed back into the church, without checking whether repentance or reformation has taken place. For instance, in the Presbyterian Church, members who wed outside the church are suspended for a period of three months, following which they can be restored to full membership, after fulfilling all the requirements, one of which is wedding in the church. Experience has shown that many young men shun the church wedding because they do not have enough money to pay for wedding expenses which include dowry, especially for those who come from the northern part of Malawi. What they usually do is to elope the woman ("marriage by eloping" to use Klaus Fiedler's terminology),⁷⁸ serve the suspension, and then seek restoration into the communion of the church. This is the pattern that many follow, and the Presbyterian Church

⁷⁵ The church believes that for "the erring one, God's servants have work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance." "Church Discipline," in *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, Herald Publishing Association, 2000, p. 182.

⁷⁶ On the SDA theology of rebaptism see: Yonah Matemba, *The Practice of Rebaptism in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church*, MA, University of Malawi, nd.

⁷⁷ For instance, the Assemblies of God membership manual states that "a member on discipline shall be required to attend special set mentoring sessions and prayer with a mentor provided by the disciplinary committee... The disciplinary team shall appoint a counsellor to help the disciplined member through a process of restoration." *International Christian Assembly: Membership Manual*, nd. np. pp. 21-25.

⁷⁸ Klaus Fiedler, "For the Sake of Christian Marriage, Abolish Church Weddings," *Religion in Malawi*, No. 5, 1995, pp. 22-27.

has accepted it. Even those who consult diviners also know that they will be suspended for some time but they will be received back in due course.⁷⁹

Partiality in Carrying out Discipline

Some perceive discipline to be something that is done to ordinary members, leaving out church leaders and some respected people in society. The church tends to be lenient and overlook some discipline cases depending on the nature of the offence, and in some cases, the offender. One respondent, who was suspended in CCAP whose story is narrated above, explained that while she was suspended, the village headman was spared, out of respect. This made her wonder about the purpose of discipline if some offenders were not disciplined. She therefore views church discipline as discriminatory. In addition, some church members expressed dissatisfaction at the fact that sins appear to be graded, and discipline is applied selectively. For instance, offenders are expected to be disciplined for their offenses, but only a few cases are highlighted, while many others are ignored. The CCAP church leadership pointed out that rules are straightforward on paper, but members are not disciplined for each one of them, because some are taken lightly, such as lying, stealing, etc.⁸⁰ Levi Nyondo, during his field research, was asked why the church was not disciplining ministers who were allegedly drinking, womanizing, smoking hemp, and gossiping.⁸¹ This shows that ordinary members seem to observe that they were disciplined for the same "sins" that the ministers were committing, who they claim, were not being disciplined at all.

Discipline and Women

Generally, the church strives to carry out its mandate of disciplining members who have gone off-track with fairness, since it is God's instrument on earth, and it must be seen to do what God would expect it to do. It has been argued that most of the victims of church discipline are women, but this perhaps varies from church to church. My observation is that the membership of the church is largely made up of women, and as a result, when there are discipline issues, their number tends to be higher than that

⁷⁹ Interestingly, Christians do not find it embarrassing to be suspended for consulting a diviner, only when one is suspended for being accused of witchcraft. It appears that fellow Christians do not regard *nchimi* consultation as a serious offence.

⁸⁰ Int. Rev. L. Nyondo, General Secretary, Livingstonia Synod, 15.3.13.

⁸¹ Levi Nyondo, Concepts and Implications of Being a Church Member in CCAP Synod of Livingstonia, PhD Module, Mzuzu University, 2010.

of men. Women have a numerical advantage over men.⁸² However, there is a possibility for women to be victimized especially with regard to issues on which church leaders vote. Although there are more women than men in many churches, very few women are in leadership positions.⁸³ Men can vote against a woman due to their numerical strength.

The church records from the Presbyterian Church that I studied showed that there were more women who were disciplined than men. For example, in the two discipline cases (one of self marriage, and one of divination) of July, 2011, there were more women than men in each case. For self-marriage, eight out of eleven of the disciplined were women. In the case of divination, four out of the six suspended were women.⁸⁴ The pattern was the same in other cases that I followed for a period of five years. This pattern was also similar to the discipline cases at Karonga CCAP church.

A study of CCAP minute books of Karonga Old Mission Session shows that most cases, which were mainly related to traditional healing, affected women. For instance, in the discipline report involving fourteen people, who were involved in divination (*ulagusi*), thirteen were female, and only one was male.⁸⁵

No Discipline but Counselling

While some Christians believe that discipline is necessary, others feel that discipline should not be carried out. This is based on the understanding that discipline tends to send the offenders further away from Christ, rather than bring them closer, especially where pastoral care is not offered. Mwasikata, who was once a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has not set his foot in the church for 12 years, since he was

⁸² Int. Rev. L. Mtekateka, St. Ambrose Anglican Church, 14.3.2013. He attested to the fact that his church disciplines more women than men. But he noted that women are more receptive to discipline than men. They accept that they had sinned, and are more willing to learn in order for them to be restored back to the communion of the church. When men are on discipline, very few attend Bible classes as required. According to him, men are "arrogant" and sometimes stop attending church for a while.

⁸³ See Joyce Mlenga, *Women in Holy Ministry in Livingstonia CCAP Synod: A Study of Perceptions*, PhD module, Mzuzu University, 2008; Isabel Apawo Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 1997.

⁸⁴ Mpata CCAP Session Minute No. 36, minutes of 23rd July, 2011.

⁸⁵ Min. 272/95, Minutes of 22nd December, 1995, Karonga Old Mission Session.

excommunicated for consulting a diviner when he suffered from *chilaso* for two years. He felt that the discipline was harsh, and it led him into frustration and depression. ⁸⁶ He told me that he does not believe in God anymore, and he does not want to have anything to do with him. His wife stated that she has been talking to him to join another church, but he does not listen to her. Asked on what he expected from the church leaders after he broke the rules; he explained that the leaders should have sought to understand his situation, and probably counselled him. Mwasikakata was also bitter with the church leadership because they excommunicated him whilst he was still in pain.

It is noteworthy that church leaders may not be comfortable with the idea that the church should not carry out church discipline, because "the power of the church is its God-given authority to carry on spiritual warfare, proclaim the gospel, and exercise *church discipline*"⁸⁶ (italics mine). It has also been argued that the early church dealt with discipline issues more concretely, like in the case of Sapphira and Ananias (Acts 5). Peter did not leave the issue to God, but he acted himself.⁸⁷

Denial of Discipline

In most cases, suspended members accept the punishment that the church metes out on them. Some disciplined members show remorse and repent immediately, or a few weeks later after being rebuked about their sin, but others take longer. However, there are cases where the suspended members refuse to serve the suspension and instead join other churches. For example, one respondent, a member of Pentecostal Holiness Association, was suspended for participating in the *chikungu* ritual, which became necessary due to his connection to the ritual leaders. It was not his intention to participate; but unspecified circumstances forced him to.⁸⁸ Instead of serving the suspension, he joined the Malawi Assemblies of God. He claimed that the church welcomed him as a new member and accepted the explanation that he gave to the leaders namely that he had made a personal decision to join their church, without giving any further details.

⁸⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 887.

⁸⁷ Int. Bishop Martin Mtumbuka, Karonga Diocese, 20.12.2013.

⁸⁸ When I inquired from other church members, I was informed that he is related to some people who take a leading role in the rainmaking ritual and was asked to play a part.

Another case is that of a 39 year old single lady, Miss K.M., previously of a Pentecostal Church, who had an affair with a man who had two wives. One member of the church, who knew about the affair, informed the church leadership. The church did its investigation, called and questioned her on the matter. The church informed her that she had been suspended because they had gathered enough evidence that she was going out with a married man. She refused to be on discipline because she argued that the story was not true. She therefore continued to attend church services while she continued the affair with the man. The church then wrote an excommunication letter to her and announced in the church on Sunday that Miss K.M. was no longer a member of the church. She then joined another church.

Some Christians deny discipline because it is considered degrading and embarrassing. Because of this, those disciplined push for shortcuts so that they are restored immediately. Some may even show repentance immediately so that they can be restored to the communion, to save themselves from embarrassment. However, many established churches still require that they serve the suspension period (for churches which suspend their members). This is done because it is difficult to tell whether the repentance is genuine.

Discipleship and Counselling

As said earlier, on the one hand one form of church discipline is formative and this one is discipleship. Counselling, on the other hand, is corrective discipline which is employed to solve a problem. Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in the Lord Jesus Christ and are equipped by the Holy Spirit, who resides in their hearts, to overcome the pressures and trials of this life and to help them become more Christ-like. This process requires believers to respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting to examine their thoughts, words, and actions and compare them with the word of God. It also involves studying the word of God and obeying it. It has to do with following Jesus' teachings (John 8:31-32; 1 Sam 28:18). Discipleship involves transformation from some other world view and practice of life to that of Jesus Christ (Rom 12:2). A disciple is not an accumulator of information or one who merely changes moral behaviour in regard to the teachings of Jesus Christ but seeks a fundamental shift toward the ethics of Jesus Christ in every way, including complete devotion to God. Jesus does not call people to be merely church members who do church things but to follow him and do his works. Becoming a disciple of Jesus must bring about

a transformation of a person's lifestyle and priorities."⁸⁹ Christians must obey Jesus Christ in word, thought and deed.

Counselling is one of the important responsibilities the church has on its members. Counselling is a conversational process that can be instrumental in the development of skills that help church members live their Christian life. It involves giving advice which involves deliberating, to recommend an act or course of action. Counselling can be done at both individual and group level. With the help of a counsellor, a person can explore feelings and express them better, examine beliefs and work toward making healthy changes. Counselling and discipleship are related; counseling however is a form of discipleship that is directed towards a particular problem.⁹⁰

Many churches that formed part of my study indicated counselling as one of the means they use to build their members up in faith, especially those who have violated the rules of the church. In fact, some church leaders feel that it is imperative that those who have gone astray should be counselled and not punished because for instance, if they go to a diviner, what it means is that the church leaders have failed to nurture the members.⁹¹ In addition, discipleship is carried out through various forums and these include: Bible studies, Bible classes, prayer/home cells (where they have teachings, preaching, and testimonies), mid-week services, evangelism rallies, annual conventions, conferences, seminars, fellowships, elder schools, pastor's fraternal, quarterly teachings, retreats, children ministry, youth ministry, women's ministry, and men's ministry. The activities and ministries bear different names depending on the preference of the churches.

Discipleship programmes do produce effective results in churches where they are offered as churches make an effort to help their members grow in their faith and get back on track when they go astray. For example, in the Mpata Assemblies of God Church, during its formative years in 2005, many members used to struggle to divorce themselves from ATR elements that the church did not approve of.⁹² A change has been witnessed as a result of

⁸⁹ Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Discipleship" in Tokunboh Adeyemo (ed), *Africa Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 1223.

⁹⁰ John Chacha and Joan Bowers, *A Handbook for Christian Counselling*, Nairobi: Uzima, 2005, p. 7.

⁹¹ Int. Bernard Mwakiyale (Catechist), St. Michael Roman Catholic Church, 5.3.2011.

⁹² Int. Pastor Andrew Mwamlima, Assemblies of God Church, 20.3.2012.

its various programmes: mid-week programmes, home cell meetings where singing, preaching, and sharing of testimonies takes place.⁹³ Pastor Mwamlima emphasized that apart from teaching and preaching the word, testimonies that Christians share, about what God has done for them have also helped to change people's attitude towards ATR elements. It must be pointed out that the church population is now at forty, so it is possible that the small numbers also help the church leadership to monitor and manage the members better. An interview with a few members of the church also attested to the fact that discipleship programmes are beneficial and that they give them tools to resist the temptation of becoming dual religious.

One respondent recounted that before she became a member of Assemblies of God, she was practicing ATR-elements although she considered herself a Christian. She was the one providing love potions to women, and when new born babies were about to be taken out of the confinement (*luvumbo*), she was the one arranging for the traditional medicines and washing the babies in her area. Through the various teachings on ATR practices, she no longer makes use of them, and has since stopped administering ATR practices to others.⁹⁴

In some cases, discipleship programmes have not been effective because they are carried out as a routine, and may not have a long lasting impact on the members. In some cases the programmes are carried out to help people become acceptable members of the church (baptismal classes), and are not aimed at helping them to be converted in their hearts.⁹⁵ Such being the case, one should not expect any change in attitude towards ATR elements if no inward transformation has taken place, because ATR elements are still held in high regard. Additionally, since the programmes are carried out as a mere tradition, no evaluation takes place to find out if they are effective. Although Naboth Fungo, a pastor, asserted that discipleship programmes are helpful and that they help members of his church to resist temptations of being involved in ATR elements, there are other factors which come into play. These include social pressures which compromise the commitment

⁹³ The teachings are derived from *Assemblies of God in Malawi: Constitution and By-Laws*. Revised and approved August, 2002.

⁹⁴ Int. Esther Nakayilo, Mpata Assemblies of God, 20.3.2013.

⁹⁵ Int. (pastor), Ngerenge CCAP, (date withheld). What he said is in line with what Klaus Fiedler states that becoming a Christian often "depended on faithfully and successfully completing the course of baptismal instruction." Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions*, Oxford: Regnum, 1994, p. 259.

some have towards the lessons they learn through the discipleship programmes.⁹⁶

Youth Teaching

Among the Ngonde, just like in many churches in Malawi, the youth are considered the future church. Church leaders are concerned about the future of any church when the membership comprises a big percentage of elderly people. If churches want to experience changes in every aspect of their church, they should focus on the teaching of the youth. If the youth are not taught, then it implies that it is alright for them to do whatever they are doing or what the elders are doing. The major challenge is that many of those who are entrusted with the teaching responsibilities are not free from participating in dual religiosity. A teacher must be a church member in good standing, living in fellowship with the local body of believers and keeping away from dual religiosity. He must follow the rules of the church; Bible-based rules. He must follow God's ways (Rom 2:19-22; Mt 5:18-19). A teacher must know and have experienced what he teaches.

There are several youth ministries in different churches among the Ngonde. These ministries vary depending on denominations. Youth ministry is intended to instruct and disciple youths on what it means to be a Christian, how to grow as a Christian and how to encourage others to believe in Jesus as their Saviour. This is accomplished through teaching, relationship building and mentoring. In some churches the youth form fellowship groups.⁹⁷ These carry out various activities such as worship, drama and games, singing choirs and Bible studies. Sometimes Christian conferences are organized where teachings on different topics are covered. The primary goal of youth ministry is to teach the youth the biblical doctrine of Christ and salvation.

Almost every church involved in this study has programmes for its youth. In some denominations, there are no effective youth programmes. The youth sing choirs and do some piece works to raise money for the group's own use. Very little time is allocated to Bible teaching and related issues. Not much effort is made to educate the youth or to increase their understanding of faith. Very few churches indicated that they teach the

⁹⁶ Int. Pastor Naboth Fungo, Evangelical Lutheran Church (Karonga), 12.3.2012.

⁹⁷ Fellowship is defined as the state of sharing similar interests, ideals, or experiences, and activities, etc. It is a society of people sharing mutual interests, experiences and activities.

youths important subjects of ATR and Christianity.⁹⁸ Such churches include Seventh-day Adventist Church, Karonga Church on the Wings, Karonga Assemblies of God, Karonga Church of Christ and Anglican Church.

Karonga Assemblies of God has many youth programmes which help youths to be established in the word. The youth ministry is called CASs which stands for Christ Ambassadors. The name alone impresses on the youth to be mindful of whom they represent in their lives. Some of the activities outlined for the church include youth meetings every Saturday where the youths practise songs which they sing during the Sunday service, or drama which they may perform in the church. On Sundays, the youths meet in the afternoon for the preaching of the word or teaching on any topic (which may include one on ATR and Christianity). This is done by either one of them or a church elder or pastor. Some of the topics include soul winning, giving tithes, how to choose a life partner (the emphasis is on finding a born again one), the way one can sustain his spiritual life and cope with the physical world. The youths are instructed on the discipline cases such as stealing, fornication, drinking beer or use of drugs, smoking and warned that the one found will be disciplined. They also remind the youths of doctrines of the church to encourage full membership as some youths abandon church programmes take part in fellowships and move from one church to another.

Youth conferences at sectional, district and national levels take place every year, where youth gather in one place for three days and have teachings as well as open air meetings to win converts. At the beginning of every year the youth executive submits to the church administration its vision and plan of how they will conduct their programmes, to make sure that what they will be doing is in line with the beliefs and practices of the church. For example, 2013 was the year of "going deep in prayer to seek the presence of God," and such being the case, the programmes of that year were full of prayer and fasting. In addition to the above programmes, they conducted open air evangelism, visited patients in hospitals, visited the pastor to do

⁹⁸ Some church leaders argued that it is not necessary to teach the youth about ATR practices because many of them do not believe in them anyway. But this is true only for some of those who live in urban areas and have attained high education, but my study has shown that there is still a strong belief in ATR among the youth in remote areas.

some work like clearing the surroundings of his house, and visited the needy and the elderly.⁹⁹

The Seventh-day Adventist Church drills its youth (called Adventist Youth Society) in the church through various programmes such as morning watch, Bible reading plans, youth Bible conference, youth ministry training course, path finder, Adventist youth book club, and leadership training classes. They are also taught on how to become effective witnesses for Christ. In addition, lessons on marriage are also delivered. Recreation also forms part of the programme. Lessons about ATR practices are taught, because the leadership does not want the youth to be ignorant. One of the youths, Innocent Mwakyoma of Masoko SDA Church, testified that the programmes are very important and are tailored to the needs of the youths. He stated that the lessons on ATR practices are very helpful because the youths are socialized differently from what the church teaches in terms of beliefs and practices. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi has youth programmes such as Bible Studies, HIV and AIDS clubs, Sports, *Chilangizo* (counselling). They are taught on how they can obey God, and also on marriage issues. The youth like the programmes very much because they allow them to fellowship with one another.

Role of Revival Groups

Revival groups play a very important role in transforming the lives of nominal Christians. Christian revival is a term that generally refers to a specific period of increased spiritual interest or renewal in the life of a church congregation or many churches, either regionally or globally.¹⁰⁰ Earl Cairns defines revival as "the work of the Holy Spirit in restoring the people of God to a more vital spiritual life, witness, and work by prayer and the word after repentance in crisis for their spiritual decline."¹⁰¹ In some cases, for this spiritual renewal to take place, revival meetings are carried out. Revival meetings are a series of Christian religious services held in order to inspire active members of a church to gain new converts. In Malawi, such meetings consist of several consecutive nights of services conducted at the same location each night or afternoon. It is aimed at counteracting spiritual

⁹⁹ Int. Youth Executive member (Chairperson), Karonga Assemblies of God, 18.7.2010.

¹⁰⁰ J.I. Packer, "Revival, Theology of," in Sinclair B. Ferguson et al, *New Dictionary of Theology*, Downers Grove: 1988, p. 588.

¹⁰¹ Earle Cairns, "Revival, Revivals," in Timothy K. Beougher (ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Movements*, Grand Rapids: Baker 2000, pp. 830-833.

decline and creating spiritual momentum. Revival is believed to bring a new beginning to obedience to the word of God, and to change the moral climate of a community. Characteristics of classic revival include passionate denunciation of sin (James 4:4), revelation of God's holiness, and experiential conviction of sin. Packer expresses it thus

The gospel of redeeming love and free forgiveness through the cross is valued as the best news ever, and the exercises and gestures of repentance whereby believers distance themselves from their sins (confession to God and others, restitution, public renunciation of vices) become vigorous and violent... God works fast through the gospel in saving, sanctifying, and stabilizing, and there is an evangelistic overflow to those around, despite human and satanic opposition.¹⁰²

Charismatic movements refer to similar movements that existed within mainline denominations. Charismatic is an umbrella term used to describe the belief that gifts of the Holy Spirit as described in the New Testament are available to contemporary Christians through the infilling or baptism of the Holy Spirit with or without the laying on of hands. These spiritual gifts are believed to be manifest in the form of signs, miracles and wonders, including, but not limited to speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, healing and discernment of spirits. "Charismatic Christian" can be used as an umbrella term to describe those Christians who are in agreement with this theological position, and believe that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit seen in the first century Christian church are available to contemporary Christians and may be experienced and practised today. Faith healing tops the list.

Revival meetings, popularly known as crusades, have had an impact on the Ngonde and many have benefitted from them. Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have won many "Christians" to the Lord from the mainline churches and non-Christians as well. An interview with some Christians from the mainline churches, who claim to be born again, shows that they had a conversion experience during a certain revival meeting or when they became members of a certain interdenominational fellowship.¹⁰³ There are some who also attribute their conversion to the work of interdeno-

¹⁰² J.I. Parker, "Revival, Theology of," in Sinclair Ferguson et al (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988, p. 588.

¹⁰³ A crusade, an evangelistic rally or a fellowship meeting.

minational para-church organizations such as Student Christian Organization of Malawi (SCOM)¹⁰⁴ and Scripture Union (SU).

Research has shown that most people who have had conversion experiences outside their traditional church lead a different Christian life from the members of their traditional church who have not had conversion experience. Because of their new found faith, they resist participation in ATR practices. It is important to note that there are many who have been influenced by the charismatic movement but have not moved out of their traditional churches.¹⁰⁵ So those who are in mainline churches and claim to be born again participate less in ATR religious practices.¹⁰⁶ In many cases, when they become born again, they become members of charismatic fellowship groups, which are sometimes sanctioned by the mainline churches themselves.

Revival groups and Charismatism have played a big role in drawing Christian attention away from ATR elements by putting more emphasis on the devil and his demons. The emphasis on exorcism gives the Ngonde some form of security against the evil forces that they fear most.¹⁰⁷ Felix Nyika summarizes it thus:

Any theology that will take the African worldview seriously will have to deal with issues of witchcraft, demon possession and the occult. Neocharismatic theology deals with these issues by asserting the victory of Christ over the principalities and powers... Many pray for those afflicted by witchcraft, exorcise demons, and even free those that participated in the occult.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ For details on Northern Malawi, see: Boston Khonje, *A Historical Study of the Establishment and Contribution of the Student Christian Organization of Malawi (SCOM) to the Malawian Society (1961-2012)*, MA, Mzuzu University, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Rhodian Munyenembe, *Christianity and Socio-cultural Issues: The Charismatic Movement and Contextualization in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2011, p. 34.

¹⁰⁶ Rhodian Munyenembe noted that in the mainline churches it is mostly those with a charismatic spirituality that appear to be mostly committed to their faith. *Christianity and Socio-cultural Issues: The Charismatic Movement and Contextualization in Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 2011, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Klaus Fiedler observes that the Charismatic Movement gives new Christian answers to deep African and human concerns. It emphasizes the healing message of the gospel. "They emphasize power over sin and power against evil forces." "The Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements in Malawi in Cultural Perspective," *Religion in Malawi*, 1999, pp. 27-38.

¹⁰⁸ Felix Nyika, *Apostleship amongst Malawian Neocharismatics*, a paper presented at the Postgraduate Colloquium, Mzuzu University, 2010. See also: Felix Nyika,

The teachings and the tools that members are given help solve some of the problems that they struggle with. In this case, contextualization of the gospel takes place so that it becomes relevant to those who embrace it. The gospel is able to address some of the problems the Ngonde Christians face.

The Testimony of Mr. B. K.

B. K., a member of St. Michael Catholic Church, shared his story that he was deep into elements of traditional religion because of his quest for wealth. He was running a business and was advised by friends that he could not run it without charms. For fifteen years he had been consulting various traditional practitioners, some of whom were *nchimj*, and he claims that his business grew as a result of that. In 2008, Living Waters organized an evangelistic rally in Karonga and he gave his life to Christ. After being taught, he discovered that he was paying allegiance to two religions and promised to follow God alone and stick to one religion. He went home and collected all the charms and surrendered them to the leaders. They prayed and burned them. Since then he has never utilized charms again and he claims that the Lord is blessing his business.

The Testimony of Miss R. S.

Miss R.S., a member of CCAP had a conversion experience in 2006 when she attended a fellowship meeting at her church. Members at her church go for church services in the morning and come back later in the afternoon for fellowship. Before she was converted, she had a problem that emanated from giving generously towards church projects because she had a lot of money. When the church was building a hall, she pledged to give K10,000 towards the project. It is believed that some people were jealous of her because the pastor liked her because of her generosity. As a result they attacked her through witchcraft and in their magic beat her all night for three nights. She spent sleepless nights. Being a nominal Christian, she rushed to a traditional healer to seek assistance. She was given some medicine and was told to visit again a week later. She could hardly wait for a week because the problem persisted. She went back to the same traditional healer but. She later started moving from one healer to another but the problem continued. It was the same problem that took her to the fellowship meeting. She was prayed for after committing her life to Christ,

and the problem disappeared. She threw away all the charms and never visited traditional healers again.

Mr. Z.M.'s Story

Z.M., a member of the Anglican Church, was a village headman who resigned after hearing the gospel that condemned some of the traditions which he was involved in as a community leader. Being a village chief meant fortifying his body and performing rituals associated with his status. He was also involved in preparing the dead bodies and burying chiefs.¹⁰⁹ After attending an evangelistic rally during one Easter season, he was convicted of his sins and surrendered his life to Christ. After being taught and disciplined for some time, he resigned from his position as village head on his own accord because he felt that his responsibilities might compromise his Christian living.¹¹⁰

Pastor Hosman Simutowe

Simutowe shared his story that being saved by accepting Christ helps him to make appropriate decisions for his life.¹¹¹ He is a pastor, but at the same time he is *lifumu* (an advisor to Group Village Headman Mwahimba), a position that might not augur well with ministry, according to the Ngonde worldview. Instead of excusing himself from holding the position, he chose to serve his community and at the same time be a Christian testimony. He indicated that he does not do what other *mafumu* (plural for *lifumu*) do. For example, during the installation of the Group Village Headman they invited him to stay in isolation¹¹² with the headman, for three days, but he declined, and people respect him for that. Simutowe argued "It is I managing the position, not the position managing me."

The examples given above show the role that revival groups play in the lives of many who come into contact with them. Real transformation takes place, and in addition people are able to see tangible results. Even with those who do not see results, there is renewed commitment to follow

¹⁰⁹ Chiefs' burials take place at night. In addition, no one is allowed to view the dead, not even close family members. It is believed that a lot of traditional religious rites are performed on the dead body before burial.

¹¹⁰ Personal testimony, 2012 (name withheld).

¹¹¹ Int. Pastor Hosman Simutowe, Karonga Baptist Church, 20.3.2012.

¹¹² It is believed that the village headman and his advisors go through very rigorous rites before taking office. Some Christians feel that the rites are not in line with Christian teachings.

Christ and obey him. This is not to say that those who have a conversion experience never participate in ATR. In chapter four of this book, there are stories of some members from Charismatic churches who were tempted and participated in ATR. The only difference is that there is considerably less participation from the members of Charismatic churches compared to mainline churches, because the members are given tools which help them to resist the temptation to be dual religious.

What is clear to the Charismatics is that conversion is expected to result in the individual possessing divine power that repels any spiritual and demonic attacks, even those from witches and wizards. The new faith to which the individual converts is believed to provide the power that they can depend on for their protection when need arises. Members are assured of their protection in Christ, and they are told not to fear anything because God is with them. Most importantly, many leaders of the Charismatic churches claim to have power to heal the sick and cast out demons, ward off evil spirits, witchcraft and sorcery that are consistently seen as primary causes of disease, bad luck and misfortune.¹¹³

Churches' Contribution towards Dual Religiosity

One of the reasons why many Christians indulge in dual religiosity to get healing and to have other problems that people experience addressed is that many churches do not make an effort to meet the needs of their members in this field and when crisis strikes. There is a pattern of the level of involvement in dual religiosity and the degree of involvement based on churches. It is evident from the data collected that in churches where members are given opportunities to share their problems, are counselled and prayed for, there is less involvement in ATR practices, while in churches where these things are not done, the participation is higher. It therefore follows that if the needs of members are not met in the church, then the members will seek help from elsewhere. My observation is that Pentecostal and Charismatic churches meet the needs of their members. Responses from the mainline churches showed that people are not given opportunities to share their problems or to have their needs prayed for. This being the case, they go where they think their needs will be met.

¹¹³ Bosco Bangura, *The Charismatic Movement in Sierra Leone: A Missio-historical Analysis in View of African Culture, Prosperity Gospel and Power Theology*, PhD, Evangelical Theological Faculty Leuven, 2013.

Most churches do not make an effort to teach their members about ATR practices and the members assume that there is nothing wrong with them.¹¹⁴ In an area that is so much infested with ATR practices, there is need to focus on them. For instance, St. Mary's Catholic Parish indicated that the church does not teach about ATR practices.¹¹⁵ However, the leadership of the church indicated that although members are not taught specifically about ATR, it is implied that when they are taught about there being one God, all others should be disregarded.¹¹⁶ Despite the fact that almost all the churches studied indicated that they have different fora in

¹¹⁴ Another reason that is given for their involvement in ATR elements is that the church does not have problems with such practices, perhaps because it does not teach about it or does not take any action against those who attend such rituals. The fact that some pastors do not mind about their members participating in such rituals shows that there is no clear policy about such involvement.

¹¹⁵ Int. Father Denis Chitete, Vicar General of Karonga Diocese, 14.3.2012. This may arise from the fact that the church is tolerant towards ATR practices. In fact, *Africa's Way to Life: Lessons for Adult Catechumens, Lessons 1-12*, Transvaal: Department of Education and Catechists of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, 1963, shows the reality of this. In this book, every lesson that is presented gives the African background which explains how things were before Christianity came on the scene. For instance, in the first lesson "Your Heart Knows God: People of Africa Pray for Rain," there is a presentation on "How our Ancestors Prayed for Rain." The background is presented as a stepping stone to the presentation of the true ideas of God, spirits and other topics, pp. 7-10. In other words, the background is used to help Catechumens have a better understanding of who God is and other topics associated with Him. The ATR practices are presented in a positive way and the lessons discourage condemning our ancestors, p. 11. "Our people have a natural belief in spirits. Fear of them rules their lives to a great extent. It would be wrong to condemn all these beliefs as nonsense. We would hurt their feelings and do more harm than good. Instead we gradually give them a better idea of angels, and also teach them that God is master over the bad spirits. Avoid by all means speaking about bad ancestors as bad spirits. Bad spirits are something different from the ancestral spirits. Reverence for an ancestor is in itself good," p. 11. The emphasis is on connecting the Christian message with the people's natural feeling and thinking. This is inculturation at its best.

¹¹⁶ Int. Bishop Martin Mtumbuka, Karonga Diocese, 20.12.2012. This is evidenced by some of the literature that the church uses in teaching its adherence. For example, in *Kasupe wa Moyo 1*, Likuni: Likuni Press, 1988, pp. 18-20, Phunziro 8, there is a lesson on trusting God. In the lesson, believers are urged to put their trust in God, and those who trust in God do not use medicine to protect their gardens, houses and doing all sorts of things ("*wokhulupirira Mulungu sasowa kutsirika munda, kapena nyumba, ndi kuchita zina zotere,*") p. 19.

which the members receive various teachings, very few indicated that they teach against ATR practices.¹¹⁷

Out of the churches whose leaders I managed to interview, the following indicated that they attempt to teach about ATR practices: Karonga New Apostolic Church,¹¹⁸ Seventh-day Adventist Church, Karonga Church on the Wings, Mpata Christian Love Church, Mpata Bible Believers, Ngerenge Bible Believers Church, Karonga Church of Christ,¹¹⁹ St. Ambrose Anglican Church, Karonga Assemblies of God, Evangelical Lutheran Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church (both St. Thomas Chapel and McAllister Temple),¹²⁰ and African International Church. What should be noted at this point is that the churches make an effort to teach, but whether they teach in favour of or against the practices is a very different matter.

The churches also contribute towards dual religiosity by ignoring discipline where the rules are clear as to what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, or where discipline is simply not administered. When discipline is not administered and when members are not rebuked, the interpretation is that what they are doing does not matter. When discipline is neglected, the church sends contradicting messages to its members who may interpret the omission as tolerance towards ATR practices. In some cases, contradicting messages are sent to members when church leaders advise members to get help through divination and other ATR practices.¹²¹

Some mainline churches also restrict their members from attending inter-denominational fellowships or revival meetings organized by other churches. While some feel that getting teachings from one's church is enough to

¹¹⁷ Karonga Assemblies of God and Karonga Baptist churches indicated that they teach about a Christianity vs tradition and syncretism respectively.

¹¹⁸ A circular is issued to all church leaders which contains material that is taught to its members against ATR practices. Int. McLeod Gondwe, Community Evangelist, 17.3.2012.

¹¹⁹ Even though the Church of Christ takes a laissez faire approach towards ATR practices, the youth teachings cover a wide range of topics including traditions and how they relate to the Christian faith.

¹²⁰ It must be noted that in the past the church was not teaching on Ngonde tradition or ATR practices, but today the church teaches about tradition because it felt that the faith of the members was being compromised due to divided attention.

¹²¹ Some church members shared that when they were faced with illness or other problems, church leaders suggested to them to visit *nchimi* or some other traditional doctor.

make one grow spiritually, others feel that getting teachings from various fellowships or Christian spiritual meetings, can lead to increased spiritual growth. Those who object or approve give the following reasons:

Object	Approve
Other fellowships can bring false teachings	Can attend but they are not encouraged. They must maximize the church groupings to which they belong: e.g. men's ministry, women's ministry, youth ministry etc.
Doctrines are different so they cannot study the Bible together	Can attend but should not bring to the church what they do in fellowships
To avoid contamination of beliefs	May attend but members must be cautious
Those who lead in fellowships are not well trained	Can attend. It can be an opportunity for them to preach to others and give them the truth
Destroys loyalty	They can attend so that they can assess for themselves whether to believe in them
One is not well established	Can attend because they cannot be misled as the church teaches them concrete substance

For the churches that do not restrict their members from attending interdenominational fellowships, and yet do not meet all their needs, give their members freedom to get help from alternative sources. For instance, many who shared their stories concerning starting a relationship with Jesus Christ, healing and living a victorious life, did so after attending one of such fellowships. A good number of the interviewees testified that they learnt alternative ways of dealing with situations from fellowship groups, and in so doing resisted dual religiosity which comes by seeking help from diviners and through ancestral means. For instance, in interdenominational fellowships, which are generally Pentecostal/Charismatic, they have their own ways of dealing with issues of witchcraft which is considered to be the root cause of many problems that take many to diviners and other traditional religious practitioners. Faith healing is one of the important themes in Pentecostal/Charismatic circles. The demon-possessed are identified and

demons are cast out.¹²² Those who are troubled by witchcraft (which is identified with demons) are also prayed for. The curses that take many to the ancestors are dealt with by setting the victims free from such curses which are normally referred to as "bondages." It has also been observed that illnesses such as *fimbuza* can be exorcised through prayers.

Those who restrict their members put them at a disadvantage, especially if they do not make an effort to cater for their spiritual and physical needs. They may have good reasons for restricting them, but I am of the view that they should be allowed, provided they are given proper guidance.

Churches have the responsibility of ensuring that their members are keeping the rules and upholding the doctrines that they teach which are mostly based on the Bible. Church members have to consistently be counselled and disciplined in order to grow so that they do not keep navigating between ATR religious practices and Christianity. Sometimes punitive measures have to be utilized to ensure that positive results are achieved. This can only be done if the churches themselves regard such ATR practices as inappropriate, and that the members are well taught, otherwise church members will not know the church's stand. Problematizing ATR can only be done if what the members do goes against church doctrines and policies. Church members also have a responsibility to respond positively towards the efforts that the church is making to help them grow spiritually. Instead of looking at church discipline as working to their disadvantage, they must know that it is there to benefit both the church and the individuals. Church leaders must also deal with the shortcomings that come with discipline cases, so that the discipline exercise is effective and meaningful. Suffice to mention that the most effective ways of disciplining members is disciplining and teaching them, which may ultimately lead to preventive discipline.

¹²² Rhodian Munyenembe, *Christianity and Socio-cultural Issues: The Charismatic Movement and Contextualization in Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2011, p. 55.

Chapter 5: The Bible and Traditional Beliefs and Practices

The current chapter focuses on the use of the Bible by the Ngonde in supporting or opposing traditional beliefs and practices. It is important to note at the outset that the coming of Christianity to Malawi one hundred and thirty-five years ago brought a new set of religious ideas, many of which challenged the existing ones. When Christianity first came, those who accepted it were required to withdraw from their former religious ideologies and traditional beliefs which were labelled as 'pagan.' The missionaries did not just bring the gospel, but they also brought the Bible with them, which was the manual that adherents to this new religion were to follow. Often tensions arose between the missionaries and the new converts as the missionaries insisted that the converts should abandon their traditional beliefs and practices, which were often religious.¹ While many managed to do that, some of the new converts found it hard to abandon their traditional beliefs and practices because it was their own heritage, and losing it was losing their identity.

The missionaries used the Bible to oppose traditional beliefs and practices they felt were incompatible with what the Bible taught. Malawians could do very little at that early stage because they did not have any knowledge of what the Bible contained to support or reject their traditional beliefs and practices. When many Malawians became educated by the same missionaries, their eyes became opened, and they started challenging their teachings, and at times broke away from the missionary churches to establish their own. Although it is now more than a century since the establishment of Christianity, some Ngonde Christians still hold on to traditional religious beliefs, although the Bible was declared to be the manual for reference for those who became Christians. Some of the teachings of the Bible challenged them to withdraw from such practices. The church leaders and Christians, who are converted, use the Bible to oppose the beliefs, while often nominal Christians and non-religious leaders use the same Bible to support the adherence to these beliefs.

¹ John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*, Blantyre: CLAIM-Kachere, 2000, p. 229.

The Bible can be used in several ways to support or oppose traditional beliefs and practices. First, it is important to point out that not all that is traditional is bad and cannot be useful in one's Christian life. There is no way one can live a Christian life disregarding one's own tradition, but the issue here is singling out those traditions and practices that might not be compatible with effective Christian living. For instance, the Old Testament is full of beliefs and practices that the Canaanites held dearly. The Israelites, who were the people of God, occupied the land inhabited by the Canaanites, and had to make choices as to what traditions they were to live by.² They had to choose those accepted by God, and reject those which were harmful, while replacing others with important ones, some of which were still practiced in New Testament times, such as the Passover.³ It is worth mentioning that certain criteria had to be used in the process for them to determine what was appropriate—the Ten Commandments and other laws that God had given them.⁴ For instance, the Israelites rejected child sacrifice based on the sixth commandment which says 'do not kill'. Worship of other gods was thrown out using the first commandment; 'you shall have no other gods but me.'⁵

Ngonde Christians often use the Bible both to support and to reject traditional beliefs and practices, based on the situation. One of the arguments that are given in support of traditional beliefs and practices is that the Bible is a document which is full of cultural elements. The biblical world is composed of people, who had their own values, beliefs, customs and religion. Of course, the culture was meaningful to that particular context, but the issue is that the Israelites had their own beliefs and practices, and of course, their own religion. There are some practices which are found in the Bible that the Ngonde still practise today, although not in an exact manner.⁶ Some practices are specific to the contemporary Ngonde. The fact that the Bible is a cultural document may appear to give people

² Paul Enns, *Joshua: Bible Study Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981, p. 136.

³ Dan Cohn-Sherbok & Livinia Chon-Sherbok, "Festivals," in *Encyclopedia of Judaism and Christianity*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, p. 47. The purpose of all this was to help the Israelites to shun idolatry and to maintain loyalty toward the Lord their God.

⁴ Merril F. Unger, 'Magic, Magicians,' *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Chicago: Moody, 1985, pp. 799-804.

⁵ R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965, p. 76.

⁶ Examples here include polygamy and the principle of patriarchy.

some leeway to practice their own beliefs, some of which might not be religious, without assessing whether what they do is acceptable to God. The tricky part is that in some instances, God appears to be categorical at condemning some of the Israelite practices that were pagan while he did not condemn others. One of the examples is polygamy. King Solomon, who married 700 wives and had 300 concubines, is presented as one of the wisest persons who ever lived. God never condemned him for marrying many wives, but punished him because the foreign wives turned Solomon's heart away from God (1 Kings 11:1ff). So, the Bible appears to encourage certain elements of culture, some of which might not make sense to the modern reader.⁷ Paul Tillich observes that religion is culture and therefore cannot be devoid of cultural elements. He expresses it thus

The form of religion is culture. This is especially obvious in the language used by religion. Every language, including that of the Bible, is the result of innumerable acts of cultural creativity.⁸

Since traditional beliefs and practices is such a wide subject, I will discuss the use of the Bible in supporting and opposing traditional beliefs and practices with particular attention to the beliefs that are commonly held by the Ngonde. The beliefs and practices include those that many Christians continue to hold on to, namely divination, curative and protective medicines, relationship with ancestral spirits, rainmaking, magic and witchcraft, and cursing. This chapter looks at how the Ngonde use the Bible to either support or reject traditional religious beliefs. Mention should be made at the outset that this is not a discussion on whether the Ngonde use the Bible correctly or incorrectly, it is rather a presentation of how Christians use Scripture to defend or oppose traditional beliefs. It must be noted that on many occasions Ngonde Christians could not give the exact biblical references to support or reject the traditional beliefs and practices, all they said was that it is written in the Bible, or that one person preached about it from the Bible.⁹

⁷ One of the examples is what is happening in the book of Ruth 3. Ruth's uncovering of Boaz's feet, lying down and asking Boaz to spread his cloak over her. In Chapter 4, the custom of redeeming and exchanging, and the taking off of the sandal and giving it to another to show that a transaction is complete.

⁸ Paul Tillich, in Robert C. Kimball, *Theology of Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 47.

⁹ This was generally true for ordinary church members particularly from mainline churches and African Independent Churches. However, pastors and some church leaders appear to have wide knowledge of scriptures and could refer to them

Divination

Divination is the means by which people attempt to obtain some information or action for themselves from powers above them, about matters and events currently hidden from them. The events could be current or those that will happen in the future. There are special people that are in a position to access the information that is hidden from others called diviners (*injimi* or *nchimi* in Kyangonde). Some become diviners after being possessed by a particular spirit and this becomes a way through which they enter the spirit world to get the hidden information. Sometimes the information is made available to diviners through dreams.¹⁰ Others just learn how to manipulate and use certain objects for divination, such as stones, palm reading, bones, and gourds. John Mbiti states that diviners "are the agents of unveiling mysteries of human life. This is done through the use of mediums, oracles, being possessed, divination objects, common sense, intuitive knowledge and insight, hypnotism and other secret knowledge."¹¹ In most cases, people seek the hidden information from those who are closer to the superhuman powers because the information resides in a spirit or divinity that is beyond their reach.

Divination, which is commonly used by Ngonde Christians for various reasons as described in chapter four, finds some support from the Bible. The verses that some Ngonde Christians quote in support of consulting diviners is Saul's visitation to a diviner in 1 Samuel 28: 3-20, although the story is actually teaching against divination.¹² This is the text in which both divination and communication with departed spirits are found. King Saul, who was threatened by the Philistinian army which had gathered to fight against Israel, turned to a medium, although he had banished the mediums from his kingdom. Saul was afraid and he panicked. He inquired of the Lord but the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by

easily. Members of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement seemed to know the scriptures well.

¹⁰ A number of the *nchimi* (diviners) stated that prescriptions are communicated to them through dreams. *Misyuka* (spirits) communicate to them.

¹¹ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, p. 231.

¹² Walvoord notes that Saul purged out the mediums (Hebrew: *obot*), those who communicated with the dead, because God was not pleased with them. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Old Testament*, Colorado Springs: Cook, 2000, p. 454.

prophets (1 Sam 28:6). He finally sent his servants to specifically look for a woman medium who could come to his aid. He consulted the woman diviner¹³ in Endor, who brought up Samuel, who had died and had been buried in Ramah, his own city. The calling up of the dead for purposes of consultation or divination is known as necromancy.¹⁴ Saul had a conversation with Samuel, and in that conversation, Samuel complained, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" (1 Sam 28:15). Saul eventually got the help that he was looking for. It is noteworthy that Saul consulted the diviner because he was faced with a crisis as expressed in his own words to Samuel, "I am in great distress." Saul said: "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do" (1 Sam 28:15). "It was out of desperation that he consulted a medium and to do so he had to go as far north as Endor."¹⁵ When the legitimate means (prophets or dreams) failed, he used an illegitimate one to get help. However, some scholars regard this story as not endorsing the activities of mediums; God's guidance is never to be obtained from them. The intention is to emphasize Saul's hopelessness – and to show how low he had sunk.¹⁶ It is also debatable whether it was indeed Samuel who came up or whether it was someone who took his shape.¹⁷

In the biblical world, divination was carried out using different methods which included use of oracles, use of mediums, and casting of lots. Ezekiel 21:21-22 gives a hint as to how a specific kind of divination might have been performed.

¹³ The term used in the Kyangonde Bible is descriptive *unkikulu undagusi* (1 Samuel 28: 7, which literally means "a woman who divines"). *Baibulo: Inongwa Inunu*, Blantyre: The Bible Society of Malawi, 1992. The Hebrew word for divination is *qāsam*. See John R. Kohlenberger III and James A. Swanson, *The Hebrew English Concordance to the Old Testament with the New International Version*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, p. 1412.

¹⁴ Stephen Benko, "Magic and Divination" in Paul J. Achtemeier (ed), *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985, pp. 594-596.

¹⁵ D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer and G.J. Wenham, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995, p. 319.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Tokunboh Adeyemo (ed), *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary*, Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006, p. 375. ("A session with a medium is described in 28:11-14. A familiar figure appears, who may genuinely have been the spirit of Samuel, but who could equally well have been a demon taking on his appearance.")

For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination he shakes the arrows; he consults the teraphim; he looks at the liver. Into his right hand comes the divination for Jerusalem (ESV).¹⁸

It is vital to note that biblical divination had its emphasis on finding out about the future—it was basically the art of foretelling the future by invoking the aid of external objects or movements or consultation of spirits.

Kaufmann observes that divination played an important role in the Israelite religion. Being close to God, "Israel made inquiries to him concerning all aspects of life, whether public or private crises, in large and small matters, it was the custom to seek an oracle."¹⁹ They made inquiries to God about loss of property, sickness or accident, a painful pregnancy, appointment of a king and declaration of war.²⁰ Failure to obtain an oracle was a sign of God's anger against the one who was seeking the message. God had turned away from Saul because he was not happy with his disobedience. So the point is that divination was allowed but had to be done using authentic means, through the Urim and Thummim,²¹ the ephod, lots, dreams and prophecy. However, divination using other means such as those used by the Canaanites, who were pagans, was not allowed by God. Divination through idols and other instruments was not allowed. In the New Testament, the disciples are also seen using a certain kind of divination. They cast lots, in addition to prayers, to replace Judas with Matthias as the 12th apostle (Acts 1:21-26). They cast lots to determine God's will because they had to make a choice between two people, Justus and Matthias. In some cases, God seems to give approval to divination.

¹⁸ English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible.

¹⁹ An oracle is a message from a god, usually in response to an inquiry; also the sacred precincts whose powers made it possible for the oracle-prophet to consult the god.

²⁰ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Babylonia Exile*, University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 87. His references are 1 Sam 9:3ff; Gen 25:22; 1 Ki 14:1ff; 2 Ki 4:22ff.

²¹ This was the device which was consulted by priests to determine God's response to "yes" or "no" questions asked by the leader of the people. It is believed that Urim and Thummim were devices in the form of stones that were used to determine the will of God. Merrill F. Unger, "Urim and Thummim," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Chicago: Moody, 1985, pp. 1319-1320. "If the priest pulled out the Urim stone, the answer was 'no', but if it was the Thummim stone, the answer was 'yes'." The high priest himself used a dice to discover god's will. See Pat Alexander (ed), *The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Tring: Lion, 1978, p. 127, 190.

It has been established in chapter four that many Ngonde Christians often turn to divination for various reasons. However, it is important to distinguish between biblical divination and the divination that occurs in Ngondeland. The biblical divination had to do with the future and it appears that spirit possession is not an important ingredient. The diviners (*nchimi*) among the Ngonde normally operate through spirit possession, although some do use objects such as gourds, stones, bones and other objects. The one involved in divination is possessed by a spirit of a departed ancestor at the start of their profession.²² There is also a connection between possession and divination.²³ Diviners, who have gone to the land of the dead and returned, often do their work with the aid of the departed spirits through possession. That is why they are able to tell someone that they have angered the ancestors because they are in constant contact with them. What is common between the biblical divination and that of the Ngonde is that the diviners are consulted for various reasons. However, the Ngonde go to diviners to inquire mainly about illness, and more specifically their causes, and what should be done as remedy. Divination is mostly connected to witchcraft; a situation which is not common in the Bible. In addition, they inquire about lost individuals or property, they want to know about their life, they want to establish whether a witch has killed their relative etc.

What is striking in King Saul's story is that he consulted a medium because he was under pressure. He had banished all the mediums out of his country in an effort to stamp out the divination practice, but when he was in a crisis, he reverted to them, and disguised himself by putting on different clothes so that the woman should not recognize him. Additionally, he went to her by night. This is exactly what happens among the Ngonde Christians who consult diviners. They usually visit during times of crisis: in the event of sudden or protracted illness, when they are being disturbed by witches, when they can not have children, for example. The crisis does dictate whether they should go to the diviner. Further, since most of the Christian churches do not permit consultation of diviners, many Christians do it secretly hoping that no one will report them to the leaders. Of course, Saul

²² The diviners I interviewed explained that they suffered from a spirit possession disease (*fimbuza*) and that at one point they 'died' and were brought back to life before they could start divination. The length of time one remained dead ranged from seven hours to two days.

²³ Boston Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015.

inquired of the Lord but did not get an answer. This cannot be said about the Ngonde Christians because evidence is lacking. The issue here is that divination exists because the spirit world is hidden from the eyes of the living and information about it cannot be gained by normal learning. Divination is a way of contacting the spiritual world. Various cultures have ways of accessing that information. Ancient Israelites had their own means, and the Ngonde, too, follow theirs.

Those who reject divination also use the Bible to support their position. Usually, divination is preached against because it is considered to be heathen and equivalent to idol worship.²⁴ Some equate divination to occultism.²⁵ Christians are therefore urged not to believe in other gods, because God is a jealous God. Diviners are believed to be liars and "Satanists" who should not be trusted. One pastor stated that in the past divination was happening due to ignorance, but should not continue. In the time of ignorance, God treated people with lenience; but he no longer does

²⁴ The Catechism for the Roman Catholic Church clearly addresses the issues of superstition, divination and magic under the first commandment "You shall have no other gods before me." For instance, the catechism states that "all forms of *divination* are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future," (Deut. 18:10; Jer 29:8). Article I, No. 2116 in "The Catholic Catechism," www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm# (4.3.2013). Similarly, the Presbyterian Church's catechism addresses the issue of divination as idol worship and as "consulting with the devil." "The Larger Catechism," in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education & Publications, 1990, p. 62. The Seventh-day Adventists express it well in the *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2nd edition, Silver Spring: Pacific Press, 2005. For the Assemblies of God see *Assemblies of God in Malawi: Constitution and By-laws*, 2002.

²⁵ Occultism refers to that which is beyond the range of ordinary human knowledge; to mysterious or concealed phenomena; to inexplicable events. It is frequently used in reference to certain practices which include divination, fortune telling, spiritism, mediumship, sorcery, and magic. Both Old Testament and New Testament condemn them. In the Old Testament they are referred to as "abominable practices" of the pagan cultures which coexisted with the Israelites. Involvement with the occult arts was frequently compared to adultery. R.M. Enroth, "Occult, The," in Walter Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, pp. 787-788.

that today.²⁶ Christians should put their trust in God who can hear their prayers.²⁷

1 Kings 18:21²⁸ is used by some pastors to teach Christians that they should follow God alone, for he is the only God. Similarly, Isaiah 8:19 encourages Christians to consult God, and not diviners, "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?"²⁹

Although some Ngonde Christians use the Bible to support religious traditional beliefs and practices, it is clear that both the Old and the New Testament are strongly against magic and divination. The main reason for this was to ensure that the Israelites remained a holy people to God (Lev 20:26-27). The fact that the Bible appears to approve divination does not mean that it condones it. The approval may arise from the fact that there was approved divination and unapproved one.

The distinction between forbidden and permitted divination largely depended on the methods employed: divination based on pagan practices was outlawed even though its efficacy was not doubted, whereas certain other practices were permitted. Thus in biblical times the Israelite could inquire of God through direct divination based on simple "lots" or priestly oracles.³⁰

The Pastor of Kingdom Gospel Church pointed out that several scripture verses show that God is opposed to divination, although some Christians are attracted to it. Counter-arguing those who use Saul's story in 1 Sam 28 to support their consulting a diviner, Pastor Msukwa stated that the fact that Saul banished diviners from his land shows that it was evil.³¹ In addition to Saul's consultation of a medium for divination, Pastor Msukwa also quoted the scripture where King Manasseh is reported to be one of the

²⁶ Int. Pastor Noria Harawa, Karonga Church on the Wings, 13.3.2012. She was referring to Hosea 4:6.

²⁷ James 5:14-15 "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven." So, prayers, and not divination are recommended.

²⁸ Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

²⁹ Int. Pastor Noria Harawa, Karonga Church on the Wings, 13.3.2012.

³⁰ R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965, p. 118.

³¹ Int. Pastor Medison Msukwa, Kingdom Gospel Church, 21.3.2012

kings who practised soothsaying and consulted mediums. All these are described as "much evil" in the sight of the Lord provoking the Lord to anger against him (2 Kings 21:6). With reference to these scriptures and others, Pastor Msukwa concluded that scriptures show that God is opposed to divination.

Elizabeth Mwalukubo,³² pointed out that divination is referred to as a sin in the Bible and must therefore be avoided.³³ She quoted another text discussed in one of her Bible Study sessions, which, she said, was a clear command from God.

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so.³⁴

Pastor Noria Harawa of Church on the Wings pointed out that in Scripture, God stressed that those who turned to mediums or diviners were unclean and would be excluded from his people (Lev 19:31; 20:6). The Bible records that Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord, even consulting a medium, seeking guidance (1 Chro 10:13-14). One of the punishments of divination was for the mediums to be put to death. Lev 20:27 reads "A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads."³⁵

The New Testament records a story of a girl who had a spirit of divination and her owners made money by her fortune telling. Although the girl was saying the truth, that Paul and Silas were servants of the Most High God, who proclaimed the way of salvation, Paul was annoyed and commanded the spirit to come out of the girl, and it did (Acts 16:16-25). So the fact that the diviners say the truth does not mean that what they are doing is

³² Int. member, Living Waters Church, 13.3.2013.

³³ 1 Samuel 15:23. "For rebellion is like the sin of divination."

³⁴ Deuteronomy 18:9-14.

³⁵ In the Kyangonde Bible, the word medium is *umundu gwesa....uyu ikulalusya ku bafwe* (the one who consults the dead) *pamo ikubomba isya bulagusi...* (or practices divination).

acceptable to God.³⁶ The Bible teaches that humans have direct access to God, and the New Testament particularly emphasizes that the role of diviners and other intermediaries was made redundant by Jesus Christ. The Bible condemns communication with the dead, telling the future or accomplishing or claiming to accomplish anything by supernatural powers other than God's. Among the Ngonde, no one can go to a *nchimi* to inquire about God's will for their life. The fact that people are healed or get what they want does not make it legitimate. According to some, divination is now full of liars and some are in it for money and they do it for personal gain.³⁷ They use fear—they instill fear in those who consult them to believe in them.³⁸

Traditional Curative and Protective Medicines

Many Ngonde Christians resort to traditional ways of solving some of the problems that come their way. When an illness strikes, some use traditional curative measures either from their knowledge or they seek the services of a traditional healer. Since traditional healing falls under different categories from which people get their help, it is difficult to find scriptural backing for all of them. Traditional healers such as herbalists are believed to discharge their duties just like bio-medical doctors do, and therefore find their profession acceptable by certain quarters of Christian churches. At times their profession is referred to as "traditional pharmacology."³⁹ In regard to healing, Jesus' methods are sometimes cited as a backing for visiting traditional healers. Jesus at one point spat into the soil to make mud, and then rubbed the mud into a blind man's eye to make him see (John 9:6).⁴⁰ In

³⁶ Mark 1: 24-25

³⁷ Int. Tubakete Mwangomba, Lupaso Baptist Church, 14.8.2010.

³⁸ In the Charismatic Movement there are prophets who act in a way like diviners, telling people about what happened in the past, what is happening in their lives and what will happen in future.

³⁹ Katharina Wilkens, "Mary and the Demons: Marian Devotion and Ritual Healing in Tanzania," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (2009), pp. 295-318.

⁴⁰ Some scholars believe that the mud was used not because of any medicinal qualities, but rather to provide the man with a tangible evidence of Jesus' intent to heal him, since he was dealing with a blind man. As for the saliva, it was current Jewish belief that spittle possessed magical curative powers. Merrill Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976, p. 157. Edwin Blum also believes that Jesus used the mud "as an aid to develop the man's faith, not as medicine," "John" in John Walvoord and Roy

some cases Jesus touched a person, while in others those who touched him got the healing.⁴¹ In the Old Testament, there are instances where certain objects were used to bring healing to people. For example, in Numbers 21:8-9, God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who was bitten, when he looked at it, was to live. This happened after many had died having been bitten by the fiery serpents because of their sin. Many scriptures are also quoted such as Ezek 47:12.

Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.

Other scriptures include Isaiah 38:21 where Hezekiah was advised to take a poultice of dried figs and apply it to the boil, so that he may recover.⁴² These and many more references point to the fact that traditional means of dealing with sickness are acceptable.

Apart from consulting herbalists for healing, the Ngonde also consult *nchimi* for curative as well as protective purposes. People seek protection against forces of witchcraft. Christians who support this argue that what the healers are doing is helping to alleviate sufferings of the people, and that is what Jesus did when he was on earth. Christians like Mughogho do not care how the help is sourced, the important thing is for the problems or the evil to go away. Mughogho further argued that God may be working through herbalists and *nchimi* for the well-being of his people.⁴³ Another church leader who supports the use of traditional medicines claimed that those who reject traditional medicine provided either through herbalists or *nchimi* are rejecting what God has given.⁴⁴ He explained that traditional medicine is not evil. Even the medicine in hospital is made from trees. The same faith we have in medical treatment is the same faith we have in

Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament*, Colorado Springs: Cook, 2000, pp. 267-348.

⁴¹ Luke 8: 43-48. A woman who had been bleeding for twelve years got healed after touching the edge of Jesus' clothing.

⁴² Int. Alice Nakaseghe, ELCM member, 15.8.2010. Walvoord and Zuck explain that a poultice of dried figs was a common treatment for boils and ulcers in those days. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: Old Testament*, Colorado Springs: Cook, 2000, p. 1090.

⁴³ Int. Kafita Mughogho, Church Elder, CCAP, 14.5.2011.

⁴⁴ Int. Edison Mkwala, Leader, Last Church, 22.11.2010.

herbs, there is no difference. However, many of the respondents are in agreement that traditional medicine that destroys or kills people should not be used, only that which heals should. Visiting a herbalist is like visiting a medical doctor. Both are on the same level. Both use medicines from trees, except that medical medicine is scientifically proven. Traditional medicine and prayers bring healing. God is in all. "If it is not God who guides the traditional healers, who does?"⁴⁵ There are also some Christians who claim that the fact that some traditional healers use the Bible in their practice shows that God sanctions their work.⁴⁶ However, the syncretic nature of some diviners and traditional healers makes their services questionable because they tend to employ two incompatible means—the Bible and spirits of people who died long time ago. *The ng'anga* claims to be guided by God and they pray to him for everything and in everything they give thanks. The Bible says, ask, and it shall be given to you (Mt 7:7). Some claim that even Jesus Christ included prayer in his administration of traditional medicine.⁴⁷ Some refer to Bible stories on healing, both from the Old Testament and the New Testament, using traditional means, and claim that Jesus continues to heal using other practitioners and other means.⁴⁸

Pastor Vincent Harawa indicated that although some Christians find Scriptures to support traditional healing, it is very clear that when Jesus was healing people, he was not using guess work, but as God, he knew what he was doing. He was not doing it using human knowledge or experience, but he had supernatural powers. He further stated that for those who seek healing by consulting diviners, the diviners do their work in conjunction

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Int. Derrick Mwanganda, member, AMEC, 13.3.2013. Prophet Mikaya (Mordicai Mwafulirwa) of Gumi Village uses the Bible in his divination. When a client arrives at his place, he offers a prayer, and asks him to open the Bible to any text. Where your eyes reach first is where the client should read. After reading, Prophet Mikaya uses the words in the text to tell the client what his problem is. Int. 20.7.2011. This is in line with what Paul Hiebert et al write, Many traditional diviners and healers use 'in Jesus' name' at the beginning or end of their rites, and keep Bibles handy and recite words of Jesus to the clients. Paul Hiebert et al, *Understanding Folk Religion, A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999, p. 194.

⁴⁷ Int. Andrew Mwakihana, member Last Church, 15.8.2010. When Jesus prayed for a deaf and mute man he spit and touched the man's tongue and looked up to heaven, Mk. 7:33-35. Some regard this as a prayer while administering traditional means of healing.

⁴⁸ Int. Andrew Mwakihana, member Last Church, 15.8.2010.

with the departed spirits, a situation which cannot be compared to Jesus' healing efforts. Communication with the dead is not permitted in Scripture (Deut 18:9-14). The diviners also focus on the causes of the illness which is in most cases attributed to witchcraft, while Jesus focused on healing the sick. For example, when Jesus healed a man blind from birth, the disciples asked Jesus as to who might have sinned, between the man and his parents that he was born blind. In response Jesus told them that neither the man nor the parents sinned, but "that the works of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3). So Jesus' focus is different from the diviners' among the Ngonde.⁴⁹

What needs to be remembered is that traditional healing, especially that which is carried out by diviners, and traditional religion are inseparable, and in many instances traditional healing is governed by traditional religious practices.⁵⁰ This also concurs with what Mackenzie observed in the early twentieth century, "Both the gathering of herbs, and the administration of the medicine, is a religious act."⁵¹ Some diviners offer prayers at the beginning of their exercise, and others use the Bible for divination.⁵²

Those who oppose traditional healing or consulting traditional healers equate it to idolatry.⁵³ Most church leaders pointed out that one must rely on God alone and it is him alone who must be worshipped. Some of the verses that they cite include Exodus 20:3⁵⁴ and Ps 146:3-6.⁵⁵ Some pastors

⁴⁹ Int. Pastor Vincent Harawa, Church on the Wings, 13.3.2012.

⁵⁰ Takawira Kazembe "The Relationship between God and People in Shona Traditional Religion," *The Rose and Croix Journal*, 2009, vol 6, pp. 51-79.

⁵¹ D.R. Mackenzie, *The Spirit-Ridden Konde*, London: Seeley, 1925, p. 272.

⁵² I once attended a divination ceremony of a diviner, who calls himself a prophet, who uses a Bible to tell clients what their problems are, and then gives them treatment.

⁵³ "Idolatry in ancient times included two forms of departure from the true religion: a) a worship of false gods, whether by means of images or otherwise. b) Worship of the Lord by means of images that involves veneration of other things other than God as sources of life. In the New Testament, idolatry conception is widened to include anything that leads to the dethronement of God from the heart." Steven Barabas, "Idolatry" in J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, *The New International Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987, pp. 459-462.

⁵⁴ "You shall have no other gods before me."

⁵⁵ "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men who cannot save." May I add that worship of other gods or idolatry is loosely used to mean what people focus their time, energy and attention on, or what people put their faith and trust in, not

argue that consulting traditional healers or diviners opens a loophole through which evil spirits can enter one's body. The most commonly cited verse is 1 Cor 6:19 which states that "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" Another scripture is taken from Luke 11:24-26:

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left'. When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there.

Those who oppose traditional healing deem it unscriptural, and as works of darkness. It is also regarded as double standards for one cannot serve God and man, there will be divided attention (Mt 6:24). Some consider paying allegiance to ATR as "religious apostasy, an abandonment of Christianity or unbelief."⁵⁶ Others call it demonic or satanic.⁵⁷ It is believed that diviners are evil because they operate using evil spirits, and those who consult them for help are demon-possessed, so how can evil (diviners) drive out evil in others?⁵⁸ Demons are under the leadership of Satan and seek to oppose God's purposes and to hinder man's welfare. Besides, traditional

necessarily a graven image. It is an issue of loyalty. An idol is to whom worship is directed and to whom the worshippers are subject. (1 Corinthians 10:20-21).

⁵⁶ Peter Toon, "Apostasy" in J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, *The New International Bible Dictionary*, p. 70

⁵⁷ Demons and evil spirits are used interchangeably. Demons refer to "the immaterial and incorporeal nature of both Satan and his demon hosts They are purely spiritual beings or personalities. They are demonic because they operate above the laws of the natural realm and are invisible and incorporeal to achieve evil or good. As spirit personalities, demons have an intellectual nature through which they possess superhuman knowledge. Because of their superhuman knowledge, demons are consulted by spiritistic mediums, who allow themselves to get under the control of evil spirits for oracular purposes (1 Sam. 28:1-25). Demons are fallen angels, are evil and depraved, in distinction to the good spirits (the un-fallen angels) who are sinless. Demons are harmful, they are evidenced by the harmful effects they produce in victims, deranging them mentally, and by the frequent epithet of unclean which often describes them.

⁵⁸ Int. Pastor Noria Harawa, Karonga Church on the Wings, 13.3.2012. She gave a reference to the question that Jesus asked, "How can Satan drive out Satan?" Mk. 3: 23.

healers/diviners from whom people seek treatment use evil spirits, and ancestral spirits and demons are also involved.⁵⁹

Some also see a connection between *ng'anga/nchimi* and witchcraft. It is believed that one cannot be a *ng'anga* without having knowledge of witchcraft, and both witches and *ng'anga* belong to same group of demons and they bring enmity among people.⁶⁰ It is important to point out that the rejection rate of traditional means of dealing with problems was much higher from the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements than from the mainline churches. The arguments differed based on one's denomination and background. Those whose churches are more tolerant towards traditional ways of dealing with problems were quick to find Scripture to support that, while those from churches which are not tolerant had more Scripture to oppose the traditional ways.

Relationship with Ancestral Spirits

The Ngonde, just like many tribes in Malawi, maintain an ongoing relationship with those who have departed. This relationship is sometimes referred to as ancestral veneration which may not cover all there is that the Ngonde do with their departed ancestors. Some of those who have converted to Christianity continue to consult them. Ancestors are consulted for guidance, prayed to (given petitions to forward to God since they are closer to him), venerated with rituals and are given sacrifices when they are needed to help resolve day to day problems.

The Ngonde's involvement with ancestors is seen to be supported by the Bible by some Christians. One respondent gave an analogy that ancestors are found and mentioned in the Bible—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are ancestors in Christianity. Similarly, African Traditional Religion also has the element of ancestors. "God is accessed through dead ancestors which are dead physically, but spiritually they are still living."⁶¹ Because of this, the relationship is very much alive. The Bible refers to God as God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob even at a time when they were long-dead, which means that this reference invokes the spirits of the dead. The ancient Israelites felt a close sense of kinship with their ancestors and often thought of their families as including not only living kin but also earlier generations

⁵⁹ Int. Rev. S. M.Y. Munthali, Ngerenge CCAP, 21.3.2012.

⁶⁰ Int. Pastor Billy Banda, Karonga Assemblies of God, 19.3.2012.

⁶¹ Int. Archibald B. Mwakasungula, Village Headman, Mwakasungula Village, 22.11.2010. This appears to be a quotation from Exodus 3:15.

all the way back to the founders of the lineage. In fact, the sins of the ancestors could bring God's wrath on their children. The Bible appears to support the importance of ancestors because children are suffering for the sins of their forefathers (Num 14:18). In a way, this may be regarded as the dead affecting the lives of those who are living. Others further argue that God is spirit and as such must be accessed spiritually;⁶² that's why those who are spirits (ancestral spirits) should be asked to present our requests to God so that spirit talks to spirit.

Another example that was quoted on several occasions by some Christians is the idea that the ancestors themselves are concerned with what is happening to those who are living; it is not a one way relationship. It is widely believed among the Ngonde that the punishment they give to offenders and other communications that come from ancestors show that they are concerned with what is happening. Lacky Mwenitete, a Roman Catholic, pointed out that Luke 16: 27-28⁶³ shows that the dead are concerned about the living.⁶⁴

Of course there is a difference in the way the Israelites and the Ngonde regard their ancestors. While it is true that the Israelites valued their ancestors, it has not been recorded anywhere in the Bible that they offered sacrifices to them. In times of calamities, famine, drought or epidemics and other misfortunes, some Ngonde Christians do go to designated places to offer sacrifices, mostly in form of food, to the ancestors. The sacrifices are gifts to the ancestors to serve as appeasement because it is believed that the ancestors are angry, when misfortunes befall them. So this is being done to win their favour, so that they can take away the misfortune. In addition the Ngonde bring sacrifices when they approach the ancestral spirits because it is believed that one cannot go to meet an important person empty handed.⁶⁵ The Israelites only brought sacrifices to God and not to the ancestors. It may be argued that the Israelites were calling the sacrifices "the food of God" (Lev 21:6), but it is noteworthy that God

⁶² John 4:24 – "God is *spirit*, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth." Italics mine.

⁶³ "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment'."

⁶⁴ Int. Lacky Mwenitete 3.3.2013.

⁶⁵ Int. Ephron Mwambungu, ritual leader, Mwanyesha Village, 5.3.2011. There are some Charismatic/prophetic healers who tie healing to tithing. The tithe could be seen as a sacrifice to God to achieve something.

certainly did not need the sacrifices for food (Ps 50:12-13); rather sacrifices and other forms of worship were offered to honour God as king.

In general, the worship given to God was modelled after the service given to human sovereigns; this was especially prominent in pagan religions. Worshippers brought offerings and tithes to the deity, said prayers and bowed down, as one might bring tribute and present petitions to a king. Indeed the very purpose of human existence, in Mesopotamian thought, was to provide the gods with the necessities of life.⁶⁶

It is true that the Bible puts a lot of emphasis on the ancestors, but the Israelites do not do anything to show that they venerate the ancestors. They do not go to them when they face any problems, but rather they approach God through their leaders at the time. Although the Bible refers to ancestors, the relationship is not religious because the descendants do not offer sacrifices to them, and in addition, they do not need to be appeased for anything. Apart from appeasing them, the Ngonde also do everything possible to chase them away, especially when they come to disturb the living. For example, when the ancestors keep coming to an individual through dreams, disturbing them in their sleep, they have to do something to chase the spirit away. Some Christians testified of carrying out a brief but important ritual to stop a departed mother or father who kept 'visiting' them in a dream and they could hardly sleep. This shows that relationship between the ancestral spirits and the living must not be direct; their direct communion with the living is not desired.

Furthermore, those who use the Bible to oppose the consultation of spirits (*misyuka*) state that this act is condemned in the Bible (Isa 8:19).⁶⁷ However, the Ngonde regard them as intermediaries between them and the spiritual forces of the world. It is also believed that they are capable of causing disaster if and whenever they feel unhappy with the living. So appeasement is provided to make them happy. However, the New

⁶⁶ Suzan Rattray, "Worship," in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, edited by Paul J. Achtemeier, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985, pp. 1143-1147.

⁶⁷ "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" *"Loli abandu bisakuyobaga kumyako bisakutigi, utulalukisyeko ku bandu aba bali nimbepo sya bulagusi nabamanjele, aba bikwimba ukuti njuni nukwikima bo bikulagula. Kangi ngimba abandu bakabagila nukulalusya kumisyuka. Ngimba kununu ukulalusya ku misyuka mbuyo bwa kubalalusya abandu abumi?"* (Kyangonde Bible). The Hebrew word for mediums is 'ôb which when translated means "spirit" or "ghostlike."

Testament states clearly that there is no other mediator apart from Jesus Christ.

Churches that do not support dual involvement state that those involved in any rituals that include making contact with ancestral spirits worship idols, and the Bible is against that (Ex 20:7). It is against the Bible to seek the assistance of ancestral spirits because there is no communication between the living and the dead.⁶⁸ Definitely God prohibits a medium contacting the dead, casting stones or sticks and predicting the future, or any other method of contacting the dead. But those who believe that God can be accessed through ancestors claim that the ancestors are dead physically but spiritually they are still living. They claim that "the spirits can see us but we cannot see them and we have to believe by faith."⁶⁹ One interviewee, a member of the New Apostolic Church, shared that they pray for the departed. He shared that his dad, who died three years ago, one day came to him in a dream to thank him for praying for him (the dad) because he was in problems. After prayer, he was delivered.⁷⁰ This implies that praying for the dead is not just helpful to the living, but also for the dead. The interviewee did not elaborate the problems that his dead father was facing. A Roman Catholic member stated that the Catholics designated 1st November (All Saints Day) as a day to pray for the saints to remember the dead and pray for them.⁷¹ Holy Mary is a very important ancestor in Roman Catholic faith. So even in Christianity, the issue of ancestors is present.⁷²

Further, those who are against dealing with ancestors label such dealings as satanic operations.⁷³ Some church leaders also refer to it as idol worship.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Int. Pastor Medison Mwangonde, Christian Love Church, 19.3.2013. He gave an example of the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31. The passage shows that there is a big gap between Lazarus and the living and there was no way he could go back to warn them about hell.

⁶⁹ Int. A.A. D. Mwakigonja, Karonga Language and Culture Association, 22.11.2010.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Prayers for the departed are held, but in Roman Catholic faith, it is believed that those who are declared saints can also pray for the living. Int. Bishop Martin Mtumbuka, Karonga Diocese, 20.12.2013.

⁷² The Roman Catholic Church encourages prayers for the departed, including reading mass. However, in Roman Catholic theology, such prayers to the departed are only effective if they are in purgatory, so they are on the way to God ("the beatific vision").

⁷³ Int. Preacher Japhet Mwekinda, Mbepo Last Church, 21.3.2012. He could not explain how the dealings with ancestors were satanic, but he maintained that such involvement is satanic. This is interesting, coming from the African Independent

They argue that "when one prays, he goes where God is found."⁷⁵ But can one find God at the shades?" asked a church leader. Church members should not be influenced by superstitions. They must learn to place their trust entirely in God. The Bible says that you must test the spirits if they are of God.⁷⁶

Magic and Witchcraft

The word magic is defined differently by different people to suit a particular context. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines it as "the art which claims or is believed to produce effects by the assistance of supernatural beings or by a mastery of secret forces in nature." Magic is also defined as "the pretended art of producing effects or controlling events by charms, spells and rituals supposed to govern certain natural or supernatural forces, sorcery and witchcraft."⁷⁷ Goetz's definition focuses on the ritual part of magic. "Magic essentially refers to a ritual performance or activity that is thought to lead to the influencing of human or natural events by an external and impersonal mystical force beyond the ordinary human sphere."⁷⁸ What is common in these definitions is that magic is an art or activity and there are forces, either secret or supernatural or mystical that are involved in it. Magic is divided into two broad categories, good magic and bad magic. Good magic (white) is openly applauded while bad magic (black) is practised in secret and brings harm. Witchcraft (*bulosi*), which is sometimes referred to as sorcery, is the use of bad magic to bring harm on others. Witches use charms and other things to bring illness, misfortune or death on other people.

Church's side, which is expected to be more tolerant towards such practices. The Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements usually believe that such dealings are satanic.

⁷⁴ The Ngonde themselves do not agree that their dealings with ancestors are idol worship. The issue is that they don't approach God directly but through ancestors, who are close to God. The issue is that of proximity.

⁷⁵ This statement is controversial. It is nearly impossible to describe the place where God is found. He may not be found in the shades, but where can He be found?

⁷⁶ 1 John 4:1. Int. Pastor Vincent Harawa, Karonga Church on the Wings, 13.3.2012.

⁷⁷ Andre Kole, <http://www.andrekoleministr.com> (13.12.2011).

⁷⁸ Philip Goetz (ed.), *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1995, p. 298.

As pointed out in the previous chapters, belief in witchcraft is very much alive among the Ngonde and many people, including Christians, live in fear. Because of this, many do consult *nchimi* and other traditional healers to protect themselves from witchcraft attacks. There are some Christians who are believed to be practicing witchcraft or magic. There is a belief in witchcraft, that is, an innate power to harm others exercised by certain individuals. By using bad magic, one is able to interfere with the rains (stop rain), to turn into a lion, to increase his crop production, to make a pregnancy disappear, for example. Good magic is used for protective purposes and chiefs use it for that purpose. The chiefs are often targets of witchcraft attacks and therefore must have powers to fight the witches. There is a belief in medicines, that is, in a mystical power residing in certain material substances used by the chiefs for protection. Although some people claim that magic and witchcraft do not exist, the Bible makes numerous references to it. "Contrary to what some people say about magic and witchcraft, the Bible believes in magic."⁷⁹ The first reference to magic and sorcery is found in the Old Testament in the confrontation between Moses and the Egyptian magicians in the presence of Pharaoh (Ex 7:8ff). Using their secret arts, the Egyptian magicians were able to perform actions similar to those that Moses and Aaron performed. The magicians were able to do this because

Egypt was permeated with magical beliefs. It developed an enormous literature on the subject and a ramified manufacture of magical objects. Magic was called upon at every turn in life to ward off spirits of the dead, demons, scorpions, serpents, wild beasts, fire, rain, injury, sickness, and enemies; to protect women in childbirth and new-born infants, and to insure the dying man happiness beyond the grave.⁸⁰

Regarding magic and witchcraft, Ngonde Christians, both nominal and active, do agree that they are evil. Many of my respondents could hardly quote a verse that could be used to support magic and witchcraft, although there are several portions of Scripture which could be used for that purpose.⁸¹ However, several verses are used to oppose magic and

⁷⁹ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Babylonia Exile*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 79.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 41.

⁸¹ It appears that there is a unanimous agreement that these two should not be supported by Scripture because they are vices. This is interesting because they do support some elements that belong to African Traditional Religion with Scripture, which shows that they do not have problems with them, as Christians. However,

witchcraft. For instance, some Christians cite Ex 22:18 and Deut 18:10, where the Bible forbids magic and sorcery and where the penalty of death is prescribed for those who practise it. This includes both white and black magic. The Bible portrays magic and witchcraft as a product of heathens and anyone who practices as not being in good standing with God.⁸²

Other Christians quote New Testament passages which speak against magic and witchcraft. The passages commonly cited are those which list some of the immoralities that God condemns such as Gal 5:19-21 and Rev 21:8; 22:15. In the New Testament, the word sorcery (bad witchcraft)⁸³ is commonly used, and in some cases, the word witchcraft is used. Of course this is dependent on the version of the Bible that one is using. Churches among the Ngonde also condemn sorcery and magic because of its association with demonic activities.⁸⁴ It is associated with practices of spiritualism, which are forbidden by God. Mwenendeka claimed that those who practice witchcraft do so at night and cannot claim that they are doing it in the name of God. This confirms that it is evil, and the Bible forbids it. Even Christians are encouraged not to fear witchcraft because it is believed that it has no power on those who believe in God. They are under God's protection.⁸⁵ Witchcraft is believed by many to be satanic – it is worship of Satan and the use of sorcery for evil intent. "*Balosi bakwendera mwa Setano. Balosi bwana wabo we Setano*" (Witchcraft is associated with Satan. Their boss is Satan).⁸⁶ Generally, many see a relationship between the devil and witches. Both of them kill. The devil is believed to be the

practice of magic and sorcery is recorded in both the Old and New Testament where magic and sorcery were practiced openly. A New Testament example could be given of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:19-24). He practiced magic in Samaria and all were amazed. Perhaps Simon was doing it as part of entertainment. Of course, others did express that "This man is the power of God that is called Great" (Acts 8:10). In chapter 13, Barnabas and Saul went out to preach the gospel in Paphos where they met a magician called Bar-Jesus. Although there are several references to magic and sorcery, it is not certain if what is practised in the Bible is similar to what is practiced among the Ngonde. Suffice to say that what is recorded seems difficult to read as texts supporting magic.

⁸² Int. Arnold Mwambunge, Living Waters Church, 14.3.2012.

⁸³ The Kyangonde words used in the passages are *ubulosi* (witchcraft) and *balosi* (witches/wizards).

⁸⁴ Int. Lloyd Mwenendeka, Assemblies of God, 17.3.2012.

⁸⁵ Int. Rhoda Mboma, Lupaso Baptist Church, 15.8.2010.

⁸⁶ Int. Preacher Japhet Mwekinda, Mbepo Last Church, 21.3.2012.

father of all witches.⁸⁷ The devil, the demons and witches work together. The devil is assisted by satanic demons. Witches deal directly with the devil.⁸⁸

Curses (*Kigune*)

The Ngonde have their own way of expressing their anger and dissatisfaction towards those who are disobedient, especially those who are younger than and sometimes related to them. There are times when young ones are punished, reprimanded or cursed. The result of a curse is misfortune, harm or calamity. "A curse is a spoken word calling upon the mystical powers to harm another person."⁸⁹ It is the expression of a wish that evil may befall another person so that they may learn a lesson and repent of their wrong doing. Elders or parents can curse (*kuguna*)⁹⁰ younger people, even their children, for their lack of respect and for disobedience. Among the Ngonde, those cursed experience a lot of suffering such as lack of employment, lack of children, and persistent misfortunes, unless they go back to the elders or parents to apologize. They cannot make any progress unless the curse is removed. It is vital to note that the curses are not planned but are dictated by the situation. For instance, a son who beats up his father may be cursed due to the anger expressed by his father immediately after being beaten. Curses are separate from witchcraft; they are spoken words, sometimes followed by an action, such as spitting of saliva or squeezing of the milk from a mother's breast so that it falls on the ground, if the one offended is a woman. The Scriptures use the term "curse" (Hebrew *qēlālā* and *hērem*; Greek *katara* and *anathema*) as "an expressed wish for evil."⁹¹ The common use of the word is in contrast to blessing. For the people of Israel were given the choice of obedience and God's blessing or disobedience and God's curse.

⁸⁷ Int. Pastor Medison Msukwa, Karonga Kingdom Gospel Church, 21.3.2012.

⁸⁸ Int. Pastor Billy Banda, Karonga Assemblies of God, 19.3.2012.

⁸⁹ Richard Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, rev. ed. 2005, p. 97.

⁹⁰ This concept was described in detail in chapter 1. Elders can utter some words, can spit on the ground, or a mother can squeeze milk from her breast to the ground while uttering some words expressing anger.

⁹¹ Charles L. Feinberg, "Curse" in Walter Elwell (ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, p. 290.

Some Christians quote Gen 4:11-12⁹² in which God curses Cain after Cain killed his brother Abel to support the use of curses. God cursed Cain as a punishment for the evil thing that he had done. God used the curse as an expression of a wish that evil may befall Cain.⁹³ Others do cite Gen 3:14-19 in which God pronounced several curses after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. The first curse was directed towards the serpent, which, unlike other creatures, must crawl on its belly and the man must sweat to produce food to eat because God cursed the ground.⁹⁴ Quite a few respondents referred to the book of Psalms where curses are pronounced on perceived enemies.⁹⁵

Preacher Simkonda⁹⁶ referred to a case in the Bible found in 2 Ki 2:23-24 in which a curse was used and it turned out to be the commonly quoted portion of Scripture by many of the respondents. Elisha was on his way to Bethel when some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go on up, you bald-head!" When he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord.⁹⁷ Then two bears came out of the woods and attacked forty-two of the boys. The curse was pronounced on the boys because of the lack of respect for Elisha who was the prophet of God.

Elisha then called down a curse on the villains. This cursing stemmed not from Elisha's pride but from their dis-respect for the Lord as reflected in their treatment of His spokesman.⁹⁸

It is believed that even today, people are being cursed for not treating pastors with respect. One pastor explained that the reason people must respect the "men of God" (pastors) is that they may get blessings or curses

⁹² God said, "Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you, you will be a restless wanderer on the earth" Verse 11 of the Kyangonde version reads "*Popapo lilino uli **ngunigwa** (the cursed one) pakisu iki kyaseme itolo ukwambilila kumyako ilopa lya nnugunago.*"

⁹³ Int. Lewis. Mwambira, member, Presbyterian Church, 16.8.2010.

⁹⁴ Int. Happy Mwangolera, member, Evangelical Lutheran Church, 12.3.2012.

⁹⁵ Notably, Psalms 54, 69, and 109 where curses are pronounced upon enemies.

⁹⁶ Int. Robert Simkonda, Church of Christ, 14.3.2012.

⁹⁷ In the Kyangonde Bible, 2 Kings 2:24 reads "*Unsololi yula alinkusyutuka alinku-babona, alinkwenda **nukubaguna**, mu ngamu ya Ntwa.*"

⁹⁸ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Old Testament*, Colorado Springs: Cook, 2000, p. 542.

depending on how they treat them.⁹⁹ These are some of the ways in which the Ngonde use the Bible to support the traditional practice of using curses.

While some use Scripture to support the use of curses, other Ngonde Christians are not comfortable with the curses. Some believe that we are living in the days of grace and as such no one should curse the other.¹⁰⁰ Pastor Mwangonde added that the New Testament advocates blessings, love and forgiveness rather than curses.¹⁰¹ Those who curse others must be put to death (Mt 15:4). Cursing is therefore considered to be sin against God, because those who curse are considered to have no fear of God in their hearts. C.L. Feinberg is of the opinion that "the rarity of the curse in the New Testament is in keeping with the spirit of the new age."¹⁰²

Rainmaking

Among the Ngonde, a rainmaker is essential because there are times when rains become erratic. The rainmaker's duties are performed concurrently with that of a ritual leader who mobilizes people to go and offer prayers and sacrifices at a designated place. Many Ngonde Christians form part of the group that offers prayers and sacrifices to the ancestors. When there is a threat of drought, people are always concerned that they have done something wrong and they need to go to the ancestors and pray for forgiveness and ask for their favour. *Chikungu* is the ritual that is carried out when there are droughts, floods and other calamities. Lack of rain is a warning sign, not necessarily a punishment for something that is wrong that the ancestors, especially chiefs, are angry with.¹⁰³ It is believed that the

⁹⁹ In reference to this, 1 Chron 16:22 and Psalm 105:15 are cited, "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm." Some pastors consider themselves to be anointed by God to do his work. When I asked one of such pastors whether he was a prophet, he said yes, in the sense that he proclaims God's word.

¹⁰⁰ Int. Pastor Medison Mwangonde, Christian Love Church, 20.3.2012.

¹⁰¹ Luke 6:28 – "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you"; Rom 12:14 – "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

¹⁰² Charles L. Feinberg, "Curse" in Walter Elwell (ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984, p. 290. He, however, notes that Jesus did curse a fig tree (not a person) in Mt 21: 19ff; Mark 11:12ff.

¹⁰³ In the Bible, rains were a blessing and the withholding of the rain was regarded as a most severe punishment (Deut 28: 23-24; 1 Ki 17:1-16; 18: 18), and on the contrary, the abundance of rain denoted the rich blessing of the Lord on his people. (Deut 28:12). Lack of rain was an indication of divine displeasure (2 Sam 21:1-14). Carl DeVries, "Rain" in J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney (eds.), *New International Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 844.

departed chiefs can bring misfortune upon the whole community over which they ruled in life. The elders have to inquire first from the diviner to find out which chief might have caused the problem so that sacrifices can be offered on his grave. Although prayers and sacrifices for rain are offered in a designated place, the Ngonde society has a secret rainmaker who 'makes' rain through use of magic. Although there is a lot of secrecy surrounding rainmaking, it is believed that the one in charge of *mulima*, the instrument for making rain, uses medicines and other materials to induce rain. His activity goes along side the *chikungu* ritual. As people are offering prayers and sacrifices to the ancestral spirits, the rainmaker also performs his ritual and then the rain is provided.¹⁰⁴

In the Bible, excessive rain which falls out of season is considered harmful (Ezek 13:13), while that which falls in good quantity and at the expected time is called a blessing (Ezek 34:26). The abundance or lack of rain is considered by the Torah as one of the ways that God uses to reward or punish the Israelites. God used rain to punish them and to cause them to repent. It is noteworthy that both unseasonal rain (1 Sam 12: 18ff.) and drought (1 Ki 17) are cited by the prophets as signs of God's displeasure.¹⁰⁵

Those who support rainmaking claim that prayers for rain are important because even in the Bible, people prayed for rains to come.¹⁰⁶ One of the examples that Leonard Mwakyumba highlighted was the time Elijah prayed for rains in 1 Ki 18: 41-46, after Israel had experienced drought for a period of three years. Elijah's story is also summarized in James 5:17.¹⁰⁷ He emphasized that the essential thing is prayer and this should be considered without thinking of how it was done and to whom. Some quote the New Testament to argue that the Bible urges Christians to pray for anything and it will be given to them.¹⁰⁸ It is believed that the 'anything' that is being

¹⁰⁴ See chapter three for more details about the *chikungu* ritual.

¹⁰⁵ R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965, p. 321.

¹⁰⁶ Int. Leonard Mwakyumba, CCAP, 4.3.2011

¹⁰⁷ "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."

¹⁰⁸ Mt 7:7-8 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened"; John 15:7 "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."

referred to here includes rain. So, the *chikungu* ritual could be accepted on the basis that prayers are held with the aim of receiving rain.

As discussed earlier, Chizindile is one of the places which are important to the Ngonde. This is a sacred place where people go to pray and offer sacrifices to the ancestors when rains fail. People claim that visiting sacred places is important because in the Bible there are also sacred places such as the temple. In addition, the Israelites were told not to cross a certain line because the place was sacred. In addition, Moses was told to remove shoes because the place where he was standing was holy, and yet it was in the bush.¹⁰⁹ Some Ngonde Christians do not see any problem with that since the sacrifices are also biblical. Members are not allowed to take any of it home. If one takes away the sacrifice, it ceases to be sacrifice.¹¹⁰

Some Christians realize that the Bible does not directly address the issue of rainmaking, but since magic is used in rainmaking and ancestors are also venerated, the arguments against it have to do with these aspects. Although the rainmaker and the ancestors are given credit for providing the rain in the end, it is the Lord who provides it. It is clear from the Bible that the rains do come from God and God is the provider. Jer 14:22 says "Are there any among the false gods of the nations that can bring rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are you not he, O Lord our God? We set our hope on you, for you do all these things." The idea is also echoed by Job 37:6, "For to the snow he says, 'fall on earth' likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour." Gen 7:1-4 also attests that it is God who sends rain on the earth. These scriptures are therefore used by some Christians to show that no one can claim that he has powers to bring rain; only God can.¹¹¹

Some church leaders feel that rainmaking displays a sense of arrogance on the part of those involved because they might not acknowledge God's power when rain is provided, but think how powerful and wise they are to induce the rain by using their magic.¹¹² Pastor Siyame also mentioned that the prayers offered are addressed to ancestors, and that God condemns all forms of magic and any communication with dead ancestors.¹¹³ He further

¹⁰⁹ Int. Stowell Mwakalenga, Kafikisila Village, 5.3.2011. He was referring to Exodus 3:5 and Exodus 19:10-13.

¹¹⁰ Int. Cephas Mwalwanda, Mweningubwe Village, CCAP Member, 30.3.2011

¹¹¹ Int. Pastor Andrew Mwamlima, Assemblies of God, 20.3.2012.

¹¹² Int. Pastor Warren Siyame, Kabale ELCM, 4.3.2011.

¹¹³ This is supported by some scholars. "Belief in the sovereignty of one divine controlling power and its superiority to all human powers and to all forms of

said that the rainmaking ritual is complicated because it touches on most of the things that God opposes: divination, communication with the dead, and use of magic.¹¹⁴

Those who oppose the *chikungu* ritual regard it as idol worship, which was punishable by death in the Old Testament. Additionally, God commanded people not to participate in pagan beliefs, so God said "come out of evil people."¹¹⁵

Dreams

Dreams (*injosi*) were considered by the ancient Hebrews as a form of prophecy, and, for a true prophet, dreams were a legitimate means of divine communication. Throughout the Bible, dreams are repeatedly cited as a way of divine revelation.¹¹⁶ From the time of Jacob onward, God's revelations were often in dreams.¹¹⁷ Among the Ngonde, dreams are also believed to be a means of communication between the worlds of the dead and the living.¹¹⁸

Across Africa, it is also believed that serious dreams are a means of communication between this world and the spirit world of ancestors, divinities and the High God. The living communicate with their ancestors through sacrifices and divination, and the latter respond through dreams and visions, and sometimes through mediums.¹¹⁹

spiritual power to which human beings might claim access was of paramount importance. No compulsive manipulation of divine forces, secret invocation of divine names and titles, or even appeal to the spirits of departed ancestors was to be permitted in Israel," Ronald Clements, "The Book of Deuteronomy: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Vol II, Nashville: Abingdon, 1994, pp. 269-538.

¹¹⁴ Int. Pastor Warren Siyame, Kabale Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, 4.3.2011.

¹¹⁵ Int. Pastor Medison Msukwa, Kingdom Gospel Church, 21.3.2012.

¹¹⁶ David Freedman and Thomas Robinson (eds.), *Mysteries of the Bible: The Enduring Questions of the Scriptures*, Pleasantville: The Readers Digest, 1988, pp. 232-233.

¹¹⁷ Arthur B. Fowler, "Dream," in J.D. Douglas and Merrill Tenny (eds.), *New International Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987, p. 282.

¹¹⁸ For details on the role of dreams among the Ngonde see Joel A.C. Nkhonya's paper on the "Role of Dreams 'Injosi' among the Ngonde People of Karonga," Department of TRS, Chancellor College, no date.

¹¹⁹ Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Dreams" in Tokunboh Adeyemo (ed), *Africa Bible Commentary*, Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006, p. 993.

Some Christians use Scripture to support the use of dreams in various circumstances. One respondent explained that dreams are an important means through which God communicated to his people in both the Old and the New Testament. She specifically pointed out that in the New Testament, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream (Mt 1:20-24; Mt 2: 13). Even the Magi from the east were also warned in a dream (*munjosi*) not to go back to Herod after they had visited baby Jesus (Mt 2:12).¹²⁰ Another respondent stated that the Bible in Joel 2:22 ("your old men will dream dreams") clearly shows that dreams are important to God.¹²¹ So, to those whom God chooses to reveal himself in dreams, he will do so.

Those who are against dreams as a means of communication base their argument on the fact that dreams among the Ngonde, just like elsewhere in Malawi, relate the dead and the living. Most of the stories and experiences about dreams that people share relate to the dead and the living. Charity Simfukwe explained that in many cases, people tell of a dead relative coming to them in a dream and yet the Bible in (Deut 18:11) says that there is no communication between the dead and the living.¹²² In addition, the diviners also dream with the spirits coming to them to tell them the type of medicines they should give to their clients. Dreams are one of the modes of divination. This kind of dreaming is not supported by Scripture, according to Simfukwe, and she quoted Deut 13: 1-4, which forbids God's children from listening to dreamers who divert Christians' faith from God to idols, which eventually leads to idolatry.

The Bible is a cultural document and as such can be used to support traditional beliefs and practices, but at the same time, it does oppose them. The Bible records the beliefs and the practices that the people held and practised, and at the same time it is clear as to what was expected of the Israelites, who were the people of God. God categorically condemns the evil practices because they are considered evil and a threat to true religion. Stiff punishments, including death, were to follow if people disobeyed. Use of scripture to support traditional beliefs and practices, without assessing

¹²⁰ Int. Tayilesi Nabungulu, AMEC, 20.7.2011. It is noteworthy that even in the Old Testament; God used dreams to communicate with his people. For example, Jacob had a dream in which God revealed his covenant to him (Gen 28:10-19); Joseph's dreams in which God revealed his plans for the future (Gen 37: 5-11; 41:1-7); Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2: 1-12) and many others.

¹²¹ Int. Tulipoka Mwampaghatwa, Christian Love Church, 14.3.2012.

¹²² Int. Charity Simfukwe, Masoko ECLM, 11.11.2012.

whether they are acceptable to God, should be discouraged. Use of the Bible to oppose traditional beliefs should be done carefully, avoiding the extremes, such as adding to Scripture what it does not say to suit a particular context. It is noteworthy that Christians are not compelled to forsake their traditional beliefs and practices, as long as the gospel is not compromised by them. This calls for appropriate contextualization of the gospel to the Ngonde culture. The issue of consistency should always be considered because one cannot live inconsistently with the biblical teaching or morality. The culture will have certain beliefs, values or practices which contradict Christianity. Any conformity to beliefs and practices which hinder the preaching of the gospel should be forsaken. The Bible is the only authority for Christian beliefs and practices and should therefore guide those who are committed to Christian living.

Chapter 6: The Strength of the Christian Faith among the Ngonde

This study has established that the level of Christian commitment is one of the determining factors for participation in ATR elements. Christianity has had a great impact on the Ngonde. Thousands of people go to churches on worship days. Many also avail themselves for the Sacraments. Some of the Ngonde Christians have abandoned religious elements of the traditional religion, especially those who have had a "conversion" experience. Despite the temptations and challenges they meet, they have stood firm to resist active participation in ATR elements, according to the stories of the respondents. This shows that Christianity has made irreversible impact in the lives of the Christians. That traditional religion of the Ngonde has declined, especially communal practice, cannot be disputed. Christianity has gained ground, and many adhere to Christian faith, but occasionally they slip into ATR.

The study has shown that those who had a conversion experience did recognize that involving themselves in ATR practices did contradict with their Christian faith and therefore made a decision to stop such practices. Christians testified that they went to a traditional healer because they were not active Christians but when they became active, they stopped doing so. When they fall ill, they either go to the hospital or request others to pray for them.¹ The level of Christian commitment makes a big difference in an individual and it is a determinant as to what degree one will be involved in ATR elements. Many church leaders, including pastors testified to have been involved in some way in ATR elements before they knew Christ. Most of the occasions for their involvement include consulting traditional healers or diviners for reasons such as illness, searching for a job, barrenness of the wife, being bewitched. For instance, one pastor explained that before he became born again, he took his wife to *ng'anga* because she could not have any children. After consulting the *ng'anga*, three years passed, without having a child. When he was born again, prayers were made for them to

¹ This is common to many Malawian Christians; it is not specific to the Ngonde only. Bregje de Kok found a similar occurrence among some Christians in and around Zomba. *Christianity and African Traditional Religion: Two Realities of a Different Kind: A Cultural Psychological Study of the Way Christian Malawians Account for their Involvement in African Traditional Religion*, Zomba: Kachere, 2004, p. 37.

have children. The day he and his wife were prayed for, in his sleep he heard a voice (he believes it was God's voice) that said his wife will have a son, but that he will not live long. The wife indeed had a son but he died at the age of nine months. Nonetheless, the son opened his wife's womb. They now have nine children. Therefore, it took the grace of God to have his eyes opened for him to recognize that God is the provider of children, and not the *ng'anga*.²

Even though the change of attitude towards ATR elements takes place in those who have a conversion experience, it is noteworthy that they do not completely forsake all elements of ATR, for they do not need to because some beliefs and practices are not considered to be religious by those who adhere to them.³ They have strong reasons why abandoning becomes a big challenge.⁴

What Makes Christians Use ATR Elements

The fact that Ngonde Christians use ATR elements implies that there are motivating factors. Some of the reasons are outlined below.

Perceptions about Causation

Perception about causation is one of the major reasons that account for dual religiosity among the Ngonde. Since many illnesses and misfortunes are believed to be caused by witchcraft, or in some cases by the ancestral spirits, traditional means have to be used to ward off the illnesses and misfortunes if the wellbeing of individuals and society is to be achieved. If drought is believed to be caused by the anger of the ancestors, then something must be done to appease them in order for them to release the much needed rains. If people do not want spirits to come back to them and haunt them for not giving them proper burial, then they must do everything necessary to make the dead rest in peace. If accidents are believed to be caused at times by the anger of the spirits and at other times as a result of forces of witchcraft, then something must be done to protect one from the

² Personal Testimony, Pastor Medison Msukwa, Karonga Kingdom Gospel Church, 21.3.2012.

³ What may be considered as religion by an ATR scholar may not be so with those who practise the elements. For example, many claimed that using traditional medicine was part of their tradition (culture) and as such they cannot stop using it.

⁴ Some of the reasons the Christians gave were that some illnesses such as those resulting from curses and ancestors and issues of body and house fortification could only be handled traditionally.

attacks and consequences. For many, what must be done in these circumstances is not prayer, but traditional means.

Fear

One other reason for dual involvement is fear. Those involved are afraid of consequences if certain things are not done, or are done inappropriately. For example, if one is not taken to a *nchimi* when she is believed to be bewitched, she might die. Therefore, fear of death is the motivating factor for one to visit the diviner. Again, if one is unable to sleep at night and believes is being disturbed by witches who choke and sit on them, he will seek the help of diviners who can stop the witchcraft action otherwise one may become sick and die. If there is a prolonged dry spell people may not be able to grow crops, rivers will dry up and people may die. If chief Kyungu is buried during the day and not at night, several consequences might follow: some believe that the chief may turn into a lion or some other fierce animal, or else, a certain disaster may occur. Chiefs other than the Kyungu are also buried at night. There is a story of a chief, a professing Christian, who died during the rainy season and was buried without following some of the traditions. Because of this negligence, the river Lufira changed direction, the very same day. It is believed that a dragon called *nyifwira* (a fiery serpent) was angry and caused this change.⁵

There is also fear of witchcraft in many Christians and sometimes they do not know how to handle it. Even those who are committed Christians or those who claim to be 'born again' admitted to harbour some fear of witchcraft although they are taught that those who are in Christ have nothing to fear.⁶ The fact that those who claim to be born again keep "binding the devil" time and again in their prayers shows that they sometimes live in fear of witchcraft, which belongs to the same group with demons and the devil. Fear of witchcraft makes some Christians to fortify their bodies, houses, fields, positions, businesses and everything that is there to be protected. Many Christians indicated that they fear an owl very

⁵ Int. F3, Mwakasungula Village, 19.11.2011. She explained that this is a true story. She knows the river and she knows that it changed direction. She feels that the change could be attributed to other factors, but since it coincided with the burial of the chief, it is difficult to convince people to believe otherwise.

⁶ Cf. Joseph M. Hopkins, "Theological Students and Witchcraft Beliefs," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 11/1 (1980), pp. 55-66. Hopkins notes that even theological students, with maximum exposure to Western education and Christian teaching, acknowledge and fear the reality of witchcraft.

much. It is believed that a person who practices witchcraft can transform himself into an owl, hyena or snake, and these three are treated with suspicion among the Ngonde.⁷ ATR is a big challenge because it can become the devil's weapon. The devil uses fear to make people compromise their Christianity. Even pastors fear to work in areas which are famous for witchcraft.

Sociological Reasons

Some get involved because it is their culture; it is part of their tradition. People were socialized that way as they were growing up so it has become part of them. This provides a sense of belonging to the participants because that is what identifies them and that's what separates them from others, and no one likes to be outside the group. Asking a Ngonde to separate from others for the sake of Christianity is like cutting him off from where he belongs. A human being is born with a desire to have a family and belong to a community.⁸ Belonging to a family also implies that one has to be loyal to them. In addition, when one falls sick, the family takes charge and it makes decisions as to where they should take the patient for treatment. So, in Africa, one cannot be independent. Those who may want to abandon ATR elements fail to do so due to pressure from relatives or society at large. This also applies to other aspects such as funeral rituals and others.

Official Involvement

Some do participate because of the nature of their office. It is not their choice to participate but the community entrusts responsibility into their hands and they have to serve the community faithfully. For instance, those who are elected to the position of chief have to go through rigorous rituals before they can be installed as chiefs. Some of the rituals are religious in nature.⁹

The Elements they Use Meet Genuine Needs

Beliefs are strong and difficult to uproot especially when they appear to serve a particular function. The participation in ATR generally shows that the Ngonde are searching for three major elements which can be

⁷ Int. Archibald B. Mwakasungula, Village Headman, 22.11.2010.

⁸ Int. Garnet Kamwambe, Advisor, Karonga Development Trust, 22.11.2010.

⁹ Especially so the installation of chiefs.

summarized as follows: health, wealth and power¹⁰ and if these become available through ATR elements, they will keep utilizing them. One interviewee commented that good witchcraft is very helpful because it helps him to get things he desires without working very hard to get them.

Another reason for using ATR elements is that people are looking for instant results, and the things of God sometimes appear to take a long time to yield results. God answers at his own time. Some are not satisfied with God's word. They find it lacking in some ways and they think they need to supplement it with something else. ATR elements are useful and sometimes they are effective work. For instance, when people consult a *nchimi* they are healed, if they lose their property, they find it, if they perform rituals for rain in times of drought, the rain comes. This motivates them further to put their trust in either the *nchimi* or the ancestral spirits. Additionally, people share success stories and testimonies with others after their visits to *ng'anga*, and some become encouraged to seek help when in need.

Abandoning them may be a problem because ATR elements do satisfy a certain desire in one's life.¹¹ Furthermore, some traditional healers have learnt to net Christians as well, by using the Bible in their practice. which Christians find attractive.

Nominal Christianity

The Ngonde's participation in dual religiosity can be partly attributed to nominal Christianity. Their responses on the definition of "Christian" and the reasons for becoming one differed depending on the denomination that one comes from and partly due to one's experience. For many Christians from the mainline churches, conversion did not feature much in their responses compared to those from Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Emphasis was placed on going to church and receiving sacraments, such as baptism. This was important in their definition of Christianity. In addition, the reasons for going to church are also varied. While important elements were mentioned, very few are convincing. All this shows that nominal Christianity could be a factor that leads to dual religiosity. I also observed that the blanket reason that many respondents gave for involvement in

¹⁰ Klaus Fiedler, "The Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements in Malawi in Cultural Perspective," *Religion in Malawi*, No. 9, November, 1999, pp. 27-38.

¹¹ This could be likened to situation where a patient is given an injection as part of treatment for an ailment. It does not matter whether one is given water or medicine in the injection, but the fact that she has been injected gives satisfaction.

elements of African Traditional Religion is lack of faith (*Iusubiro*) which could be translated as lack of trust in God.

While some indicated that there was a struggle in their heart following their dual involvement, many Christians indicated that they did not see any conflict between their involvement in ATR elements and their Christian faith. Some even indicated that their conscience was very clear while they were participating in the elements. This could be attributed to either nominal Christianity or lack of teaching from the churches. Also, it may be looked at as culture and not religion. Some Christians stated that the church does not have problems with what they were involved in. Others, however, did indicate that the church does not condone certain involvement with ATR. This shows that many will not indulge in dual religiosity, not because they do not want to, but because the church does not allow it. The Bible does not appear to be influential here. This therefore shows that the desire to do is great, but the law does not allow. If this kind of Christians were given freedom in the church to do as they please, there would be many surprises. It should be noted that if any of the 'committed Christians' (born again) is involved in an act of dual religiosity, they are said to have backslidden.

The use of ATR elements can therefore be attributed to levels of Christian commitment. Some are more mature than others.¹² Those who are more committed have personal faith in Christ and they obey the teachings of God. Obedience in this case shall mean avoiding such things that may interfere with and compromise their Christian faith. In addition, some will use ATR elements because of their level of faith—they do not trust God fully. Others participate in ATR practices because they are not well taught and therefore lack understanding. The levels of crisis also determine whether one will use ATR elements or not.

Heritage

African Traditional Religions are considered to be the heritage of Africans in general and Malawians in particular. This is true for the Ngonde as well. Traditions were there before Christianity came and people always want to preserve them. Even chiefs encourage the Ngonde (including Christians) to keep their tradition. The tradition comprises the traditional religious elements as well. This therefore explains why some Christians who were

¹² Mature Christians are those who have grown in their Christian faith and have learnt to obey God's word.

interviewed could not really explain why, for example they consult traditional healers or *nchimi* when they fall ill. The response they would give is "it is our tradition."

Why some are rejecting ATR elements

While some Christians are using ATR, others are rejecting it. There are various reasons why this is the case.

Conversion

This study has established that those who have experienced a conversion experience do reject ATR elements because the religious elements tend to be in conflict with the teachings of Scripture. Those who have been converted try to follow the teachings and are very cautious so that they do not find themselves in dual religiosity. Once people are converted, they seem stop their involvement in ATR elements. Some of the respondents testified that they stopped doing it because they did not know what they were doing; they were still in darkness and had not seen the light. For example, Stella was involved in ATR elements due to lack of sleep as she and her husband were being disturbed by witches at night. They consulted several *nchimi* to seek help. When she had a conversion experience, she threw away all the traditional medicines and peace returned to her home.¹³ The fact that some abandon ATR elements shows that conversion makes a difference in one's life. It brings change of attitude towards the ATR elements.

Modernity and ATR

Modernism plays a role in having the people reject ATR elements. The elements are considered by some to be old fashioned and primitive and they are therefore ashamed to be associated with ATR. In addition, they find that some of the things do not appear to make sense and as such are difficult to believe. Modernity is also bringing in a lot of changes and mixing of cultures which are watering down some of the beliefs. For instance, some Christians who go to other places like urban areas and live there for a long time, do not have regard for traditional religious beliefs when they return to their rural homes. These are considered to be '*matchona*'. Gehman observes:

¹³ See chapter 3 for details.

The cultures of Africa today are no more what they used to be. In so many areas the traditional customs are changing – technologically, educationally, politically, culturally and to some extent religiously.¹⁴

Changes are taking place in the Ngonde customs, including religious beliefs, partly due to modernity, since culture is not static. However, it must be noted that there are some Christians who are still involved in ATR related elements despite the modernity.

Education and ATR

While it has been stated in chapter three that those who have a high level of education are still involved in ATR practice, it is also true that education plays a role in having Christians reject ATR. Many Christians indicated that they are ashamed to be associated with ATR because its beliefs do not make sense to one who has a high critical reasoning capacity. One fails to see connections between what people believe in and how the beliefs work. One's level of education changes perspectives about causation and other aspects.¹⁵

Generally, it is important to note that some have never been involved in ATR elements such as visiting *nchimi* because they have never been faced with circumstances which would compel them to do so. This might be true at the practical level. However, from the stand point of thoughts and perceptions, they may not be exempted from participation in some ATR elements.

Differences between Men and Women

To differentiate between males and females in regard to their involvement in ATR elements is not an easy task. The challenge arises from the fact that this study targeted Christians and generally, in churches, there are more women than men, and I ended up interviewing more women than men. However, for purposes of comparison, I purposely interviewed ten men and ten women per church from three churches, to find out if there were any

¹⁴ Richard Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1993.

¹⁵ Refer to the story in chapter 3. One respondent explained that it took a long time for him to find a job. His mother advised him to go to the village and perform a ritual on the tomb of his dead grandmother, but he refused, due to his education. He could not understand the connection between the two.

differences.¹⁶ In all the three sets, the number of women involved in ATR was higher than that of men. Several factors may contribute to this. A study of CCAP minute books of Karonga Old Mission shows that most cases, which were mainly related to traditional healing, affected women. For instance, in the discipline report involving fourteen people, who were involved in divination (*ulagusi*), thirteen were female, and only one was male.¹⁷

Effects of Traditional Beliefs on the Church

Traditional beliefs that are not compatible with the Christian faith do have an impact on the church. It is believed that Christians compromise their faith in the process of practicing dual religiosity. They pay allegiance to two masters which is discouraged in God's word.¹⁸ Such being the case, the church has unreliable members who have divided attention. In Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, it is believed that traditional religious beliefs do bring demons into the church and they hinder prayers and God's word cannot have an effect in people's lives.

Sometimes the church is also forced to compromise its standards because of its members' involvement in dual religiosity. For instance, during funerals of chiefs among the Ngonde, the church bows down to tradition in the sense that although they deny participation in the night burial ceremony of chiefs, they indirectly accept it because the church is unwilling to force relatives to the deceased to conduct burial in the afternoon.¹⁹

Conclusion

Christianity and culture are the two faces of life that Ngonde Christians must live out. People are not compelled to forsake their culture, as long as the gospel is not compromised by it. Culture has certain beliefs, values and practices which contradict Christianity and therefore such elements must be laid aside. Any conformity to culture which hinders the preaching of the gospel should be forsaken. The church has attempted with various degrees of success to stop people from practicing dual religiosity. The Bible is the

¹⁶ These were from the Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi.

¹⁷ Min. 272/95, Minutes of 22nd December, 1995, Karonga Old Mission Session.

¹⁸ Mt 6:24. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."

¹⁹ Reference is made to the funeral ceremony of a paramount chief who passed away in Karonga. There was a Christian ceremony in the afternoon and the traditional burial ceremony at night.

sole authority for Christian beliefs and practices. In situations where the Bible is not straightforward about a particular issue, other general biblical instructions could be used for guidance.

The Christian church needs to continue to teach, putting an emphasis on being born again (conversion). This study has established that the level of Christian commitment helps members to reduce participation in ATR elements. Much emphasis should be placed on having personal faith in God. Church members cannot be forced to abandon any of the elements that are not compatible with Christianity if they are not convicted of the sin that the elements bring. Church leaders cannot force anyone to be what he is not. Even church discipline appears not to solve all the problems of dual involvement.²⁰ Conversion will eventually solve the problem of nominal Christianity. The problem is that the church has become like a club where people join for membership. This results into nominalism. Emphasis should be placed on having a personal faith in Christ. The fact that some have stopped participating in ATR elements after conversion shows that it is possible to abandon.

In addition, the Christian church should be proactive rather than reactive in the way it deals with its members. As it has been observed already, little teaching or no teaching is done on religious traditional beliefs and practices and how these should interact with their Christian faith. The church seems to wait for its members to go the wrong way and then ambush them with disciplinary action, yet the Church does not take time to teach the members about Christianity versus ATR elements. Many Christians and church leaders that I talked to explained that ATR topics are rarely taught in churches. Churches should teach sound doctrine and include topics such as Christianity versus ATR. Teachings must be effective; they should not be done as a formality; they must be teachings that assist Christians to grow in their faith. Church leaders should take advantage of the church groups that exist in almost all the churches that were included in my study, to teach its members. Some churches do attempt this task but it is clearly not enough. People need to be taught the truth which will set them free. The approach in teaching should not be condemnatory, it should help people understand the issues at hand. Teaching should be done with the understanding that

²⁰ In some churches like the CCAP, a member can be suspended several times for committing the same offence. In some cases, different members will be suspended from the church at different times for committing the same offence, which means that punishment does not really deter others from committing the same offence. Personal faith in Christ appears to solve the problem.

not all traditions are evil. Focus should be on those which are not compatible with Christianity. Many people are changing their attitude towards certain beliefs especially those who understand the Christian teachings.

Further, churches must openly declare the stand they have concerning ATR-elements. For instance, some of my respondents were not aware of their church's stand concerning ATR. As to whether the church takes any action against those who involve themselves in these things, the respondents had no knowledge. Church leaders do have these issues in their constitutions but do not pay much attention to them.

The church must make an effort to meet people's needs wherever and whenever they can. For example, since the greatest temptation that the Ngonde face is visiting *nchimi* when they fall ill, it would be good if churches take an initiative to pray for the sick. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are making strides in this area, and perhaps that explains why members are involved less in ATR elements related to healing. The church should offer alternatives when they say no to something. They do not pray for the sick, the promised miracles are not happening, how can Christians trust in what they are teaching? Testimonies about healing can help change people's attitude. Those who have been healed should share their testimonies for others to see that God can heal. Sound teaching must be given concerning healing as some may not be healed because God's will is perfect. This implies that the church must take contextualization and inculturation of the gospel seriously so that Christians find solutions to their problems in the church; even for problems which might be considered "traditional", because Christ is said to be the answer to every problem.

The church leaders have a responsibility to be exemplary in their lives if church members are to learn from them. This study has established that even church leaders are not spared from participation in ATR elements. This makes it difficult for members to refrain from them. With regard to healing, some church leaders guide their members to consult *nchimi* or to perform certain rituals to have their problems solved. Some leaders do not preach or teach because they do those things themselves. Leaders should be born again or committed Christians, otherwise they become like those who are described in Mt 23:12-15.²¹ It is possible that leaders are not teaching because they are guilty of the same sin.

²¹ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you

Church discipline is important and it plays a role in the life of the church as attested by some church members interviewed in this study. When a church member is suspended for violating church or biblical teachings, leaders must provide pastoral care to the suspended member so that they can learn and become committed members. Meting out punishment without proper teaching and counselling may not yield much result in the lives of the offenders. Discipline must not be regarded simply in terms of the length of time when one remains out of the communion of the church. It must be taken seriously, as the name "discipline" suggests. There are times some church members are suspended twice or three times for committing the same offence and the church keeps restoring them back into fellowship without proper teaching or counselling.²²

hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Therefore you will be punished more severely. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much as a son of hell as you are."

²² A case in point is what happens in the CCAP church where one can be suspended for consulting diviners. One member was restored back to the fellowship on three occasions, after serving his three "suspensions" for consulting diviners.

Religious Songs and Hymns Sung during Divination

Songs collected during the divination service of Lucia Nyandovi Simbeye (Nchimi Sekani). Most of the songs were in Tumbuka although she is a Ngonde and operates in a Ngonde speaking area.

1. Nkhanire une Une nema we nema Ulozi nema une nema Nkhubuka kwa Kyala wangu	I have refused Not me, not me Witchcraft, not me, no I am going to my God
2. Charo china minga Gwada pasi tipemphere Imwe bamama, tipemphere Imwe badada, tipemphere Waukilano, tipemphere	This world has thorns (difficulties) Kneel down, let us pray You women, let us pray You men, let us pray The youth, let us pray
3. Kokoliko, tambala wakulira Bahawi wakulira Kasi kwacherangachi Ae koko, ahowe koko, ahe koko Kasi kwacherangachi	The cock crows The witches are crying Why is the day breaking ¹ (The crowing of the cock) Why is the day breaking
4. Kwenda Chiuta wanilongola maere ghinu	Walking God has shown me your magic
5. Gesi lagolela kunyanja eee Mukanitolele nyanga kunyanja eee Gesi lalilima	The bulb is glowing at the lake eee Go and get the charms for me eee The bulb is glowing
6. Nkhaluta ku mizimu namatenda ghané Gowokera Nigowokera ine aeee, gowokera Nigowokera Chiuta wane Nigowokera	I went to the spirits with my illness Forgive Forgive me God, forgive me, eeee Forgive me my God Forgive me
7. Tilombenge kwa Chiuta Tilombenge kwa basekuru Tilombenge kwa Vilaule	Let's pray to God Let's pray to our grandfathers Let's pray to Vilaule ²
8. Tilombenge kwa waroma Tilombenge kwa Kilimanjaro Tilombenge kwa Muzgoka	Let's pray to the Romans Let's pray to Kilimanjaro Let's pray to Muzgoka ³

¹ These are the witches complaining because the night is over and they can't continue their work.

² Vilaule, sometimes called Filaule, is a mountain which is believed to be inhabited by a snake which is a representation of God.

Tilombenge kwa Simbeye	Let's pray to Simbeye ⁴
9. Gode wamala bana ku zenjee	Gode you have killed all the children in the pit
Gode wamala bana ku zenjee	Gode you have killed all the children in the pit x4
10. Mwana wane walagha usiku wose Luta ukawaone wanthu wako Hevele, Hevele Malia aee	My child has cried all night Go and see your people Hevele, Hevele Malia aee x2
11. Sayanani ba Vilaule Yesu wakwiza Sayanani ku vinthenda Sayanani ku matenda Sayanani ku zimphepo Sayanani ku vibanda	Reconcile Mr. Vilaule Jesus is coming Reconcile in illness (<i>fimbuza</i>) Reconcile in illness Reconcile in spirits Reconcile in ancestral spirits
12. Dazi likufuma, uko likunjira Tikwenda munthowa ya Yehova	The sun rises and sets We walk in the ways of Jehovah
13. Mphepo, mphepo, mphepo Zaku Karonga Zikwenda na bahawi Naluta kwa Sekani Mphepo zamuKaronga Zikwenda na bahawi	Wind, wind, wind From Karonga They blow with witches/wizards I have gone to see Sekani ⁵ Wind from Karonga They blow with witches/wizards
14. Nthowa iyo Wanijalira nthowa	Oh! The path They have blocked the path (repeat many times)
15. Longola mphepo zako Vintheda Vikubaba, longola	Show me your wind The illness (spirit possession) is painful, show me
Chibanda, Chibanda Chibanda chabadada chaweraaaa Chibanda chabasekuru, Chaweraa	Ancestral spirit, ancestral spirit The spirit of my father has come back The spirit of my grandfather has come back
Chibanda chabamama Chibanda chabaSimbeye	The spirit of my mother has come back The spirit of Mr. Simbeye has come back
16. Imwe bamama julani nthowa iyi eee Tapambana lero ae mumizimu Tapambana lero ae mu vibanda	My mother open this way eee We have crossed paths in spirits We have crossed paths in ancestral spirits

³ This was a famous traditional healer in the 70s and 80s who lived in Mpata, Karonga. He has since died.

⁴ Late Simbeye was the husband to the diviner, Lucy Nyandovi.

⁵ Sekani is the diviner's name which was given to her by the spirits, which possessed her on the onset of her profession as a diviner.

Tapambana lero ae muzimphepo

We have crossed paths in spirits

17. Ine nkukhumba kulomba
Nilombereni dada
Yesu munivumbatirenge
Ndiri mwana winu

I want to pray
Pray for me, father x2
Jesus please embrace me
I am your child

Songs collected during the divination service of Mickwell Mogha (Nchimi Suzika). The songs were sung in Kyangonde and Swahili. Some patients travel from Tanzania to seek treatment at his place.

1. Twendeghe twiketesheghe

As we walk we must take a good look at ourselves

Kunyuma aliko tuta
Tuta bo bulosi bwako
Tuta bo bumalaya bwako
Tuta bo butungulu bwako

Behind us there is HIV/AIDS
HIV/AIDS is your witchcraft
HIV/AIDS is your prostitution
HIV/AIDS is your deception and lies

2. Imbumbuli sibile indumbula sya bandu
Abandu bikubomba ishabwighane bwabo

HIV/AIDS has stolen peoples' hearts
People are doing as they please x4

3. Numwambiye nani mimi sili yangu
Sina baba wala mama sili yangu

Whom can I tell my problems?
I don't have a father or mother, my problems

Nimuweleze nani mimi
Nimbuleghe ywani sili yangu
Nga na baba ngana mama sili yangu

Whom can I tell my problems?
Whom can I tell my problems?
I don't have a father or mother, my problems

4. Namutolea Bwana kwa furaha
Alichonipa yeye
Namurudishia

I am giving to God joyfully
What he gave me
I give it back to him⁶

5. Ubombire tata wa m'mabingu
Kope kubabine
Tata wa ipyana
Tata wa Eliya
Tata wa Yakobo
Tata wa Isaki
Tata mwikemo

Thank you father of heaven
Also to the sick
Father of mercy
Father of Elijah
Father of Jacob
Father of Isaac
Holy Father

6. Yesu anali jama
Yesu ni mwalimu
Tena ni deleva
Analiongoza gari lake
Lifike salama

Jesus is mighty
Jesus is a teacher
And again he is a driver
He guides his car
Should arrive safely

⁶ People sang this song during the time people were giving offerings. This was during the worship service that *nchimi* Suzika conducted. See chapter two for details of the service.

7. Jamani Yesu analea Jamani Yesu anaweza Jamani Yesu aokowa Jamani Yesu kimbilio	Jesus cares Jesus is able Jesus redeems Jesus is our refuge
8. Msalaba wa Yesu Umeniokowa dhambi, aleluya! Ikipingika kya Yesu Kimbokile imbibi syangu, aleluya!	The cross of Jesus Saves me from sins, alelujah! x2 The cross of Jesus Saves me from my sins, alelujah! x2
9. Tendeya na Yesu navema Naunavema Ukwenda na Kyala Kununu fiyo	Walking with Jesus is a good thing It is very good Walking with God It is very good
10. Nimupeleze nani Habari za mbinguni Yesu ndiye wakumpeleza	Whom do I tell? News of heaven Jesus is the one to tell
11. Pokelela balendo Bisile bene Oliyaya 3x Pokelela balendo Bisile bene	Welcome visitors They have come without invitation Oliyaya 3x Welcome visitors They have come without invitation
12. Eliya eliya mama eliya Mbombo ya Kyala Fyo tukufibomba Eliya mama eliya	Eliya eliya mother eliya Ehe, work of God The things we are doing Eliya mother eliya
13. Umwana umweru Kangolere umwana umweru Ku makwaya	Holy child Call for me a holy child To the choirs
14. Longola mphepo longola x2 Longola ku vibanda longola x2	Show spirits show x2 Show to the ancestral spirits x2
15. Bangonde ngonde bangonde Liyaya x 2 Bangonde ngonde bangonde Liyaya x 2 Bangonde bulosi Bangonde ngonde bangonde liyaya x2 Bangonde tumalike Bangonde ngonde bangonde liyaya x2	The Ngonde, the Ngonde, liyaya The Ngonde, the Ngonde, liyaya The Ngonde [fond of] witchcraft The Ngonde, the Ngonde, liyaya Most of us are finished [dead] The Ngonde, the Ngonde, liyaya
16. Mwanalume wavigamba Nakana ine Liyayawe we makwe liyaya Mwanalume wavilembwa Nakana ine Liyayawe we makwe liyaya	A man with rags I do not want Liyaya you Makwe liyaya A silly man I do not want Liyaya you Makwe liyaya
17. Mukuninyoza ine lero kaya kabene	You are torturing me in a village that is not my own.

Yayaya
 Kaya kaya kaya kaya kabene
 Yayaya

18. Nkhulwala eyaye
 Nkhulwalila pa Mogha eee
 Nkhubina eyaye
 Nkhubinira pa Mogha eee
 Indumbula yubaba, nyuma yubaba
 a-yeaee x2
 Matenda, zinthumbo, mutu-misala

19. Kwenda, kwenda
 Kwanitaya
 Kwaniyeghera maeleee

20. Elewin wanyanya
 Wanyanya

21. Mwalowana mwabene
 Panyumba na panyumba
 Banyandule

22. Botolo mwalibona x2
 Katole Mogha
 Katole ku Lilongwe
 Katole ku Khondowe

23. Liyaya lero a Nyirongo
 Mukubatauzba waka
 Yebo yebo ...

24. Balosi ndibo bomala wanyabo
 Linga mulonda mumanye
 Mumulalusye Mogha
 Yo amenye
 Umo bomalila banyawo

25. Mwe balosi perekani nyanga
 Linga muli nasyo
 Mwe bamama
 Mwe batata
 We mulindwana
 We munyambara

26. We mweru, mweru, mweru

27. Kyala unyandule
 Ilopa lyangu, ni ndumbula yangu
 Kuti inje mbumi wako
 Bwira bwira

Yayaya
 In a village that is not my own.
 Yayaya

I am sick
 I am sick at Mogha's compound
 I am sick
 I am sick at Mogha's compound
 My heart hurts, my back hurts,
 a-yeaee x2
 Illness, pregnancies, headache-psychiatry

(echo) Walking, walking
 Takes me to unknown places
 It has taken me to magic

Elewin has gone too far
 Has gone too far

You have bewitched yourselves
 Within your kin-group
 Bayandule

Have you seen the bottle
 Go and pick it, Mogha
 Go and pick it from Lilongwe
 Go and pick it from Khondowe

Liyaya today Mr. Nyirongo
 You just greet him
 Thank you, thank you ...

Witches are finishing (killing) their friends
 If you want to know
 Ask Mogha
 He is the one who knows
 How they finish their friends

Witches, surrender your charms
 If you have them
 You women
 You men
 You girls
 You boys

Holy, holy, holy

God transform me
 My blood and my heart
 So that I can be in your life
 Forever and ever

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Over a century much of Africa south of the Sahara embraced the Christian religion. Malawi, with 80% Christians, is no exception, nor are the Ngonde at its northern border with Tanzania. While it is difficult to find someone who does not claim to be a Christian, African Traditional Religion is by no means dead and often resorted to by many, who consider themselves Christians. No attempts are being made to mix the two religions, but they are both realities in many a Christian's life, though realities of a different kind.

Joyce Mlenga, a Ngonde Christian herself, explores the intricate and often varied relationships between the two and tries to find out, which factors increase or decrease dual religiosity.

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